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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

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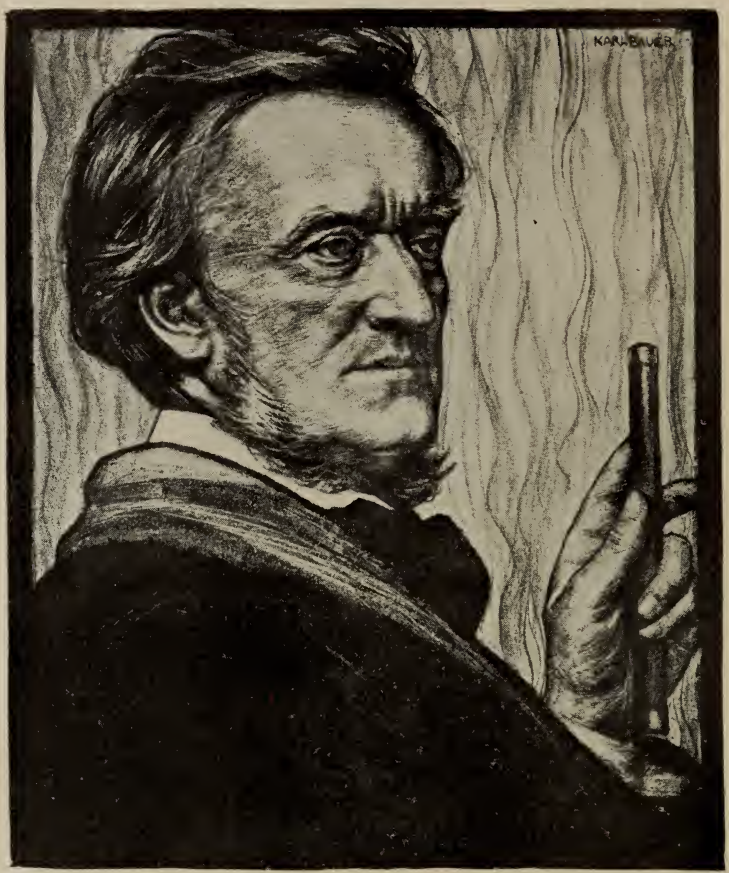
THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

PARSIFAL, LOHENGRIN, AND THE HOLY GRAIL



RICHARD WAGNER

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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

AN INTERPRETATION

EMBODYING WAGNER'S OWN EXPLANATIONS

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1905

BY

ALICE LEIGHTON CLEATHER

AND

BASIL CRUMP

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

METHUEN & CO.
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PREFACE

THE task of preparing this interpretation—in any case a most difficult one—has been simplified by the opportune publication of the invaluable correspondence between Richard Wagner and Frau Mathilde Wesendonk. At the time of writing, an English version has not appeared,[1] and we have therefore translated, with the aid of German friends, some of the numerous passages bearing on the *Tristan* drama. This correspondence has created an immense stir in Germany, since it clears up an important episode in the Master's life concerning which little was previously known, but much had been imagined or invented. The result is that Frau Wesendonk, her husband, and Wagner are

[1] "Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonk. Translated, prefaced, etc., by W. Ashton Ellis. London: H. Grevel & Co., 1905," has since been published. No student of this drama should omit to read it carefully.

revealed as having acted throughout from the highest motives. It was during the time that Wagner occupied a cottage on the Wesendonks' estate at Zürich that the first sketches for the scoring of his *Tristan* poem were made under the elevating influence and encouragement of Frau Wesendonk; and it is not too much to say that, but for that influence, it would never have been given to the world in its present form. It was with great pleasure, therefore, that we received permission to reproduce the beautiful profile that forms our frontispiece. The circumstances which led to Wagner's departure from Zürich are related in a letter to his sister from which we quote in the Appendix.

A. L. C.
B. C.

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INTRODUCTION

"THE Drama, therefore, proceeds from within outwards,[1] the Romance from without inwards. From a simple, wholly intelligible Surrounding, the dramatist rises to an ever richer enfoldment of the Individuality; from a complicated Surrounding—difficult of understanding—the Romance-writer sinks exhausted to a delineation of the Individual, which, poverty-stricken in itself, could only be made individual by that very Surrounding. . . . Thus does the Drama unveil to us the Organism of Humanity, inasmuch as it shows the Individuality as the essence of the Species; whereas the Romance represents the mechanism of History, according to which the Species becomes the essence of the Individuality. . . . The Drama, then, builds by necessity from within, the Romance by compulsion from without."—*Prose Works*, vol. ii. "Opera and Drama," Part ii. (1851).

[1] Wagner has shown that this is the root-idea of Tristan (see *post*, p. 12).

INTRODUCTION

THE *Tristan* drama was written when the musical composition of the *Ring* trilogy had reached the middle of Second Act of *Siegfried*, which Wagner had laid aside in the Spring of 1857, because at that time there was no hope of securing the performance in existing theatres of a Music-Drama of Æschylean proportions, requiring "three Days and a Fore-evening." Consequently he set himself to write a work of such dimensions as might stand some chance of being performed at once. His one comedy, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, was also the offspring of these practical difficulties, and was originally sketched as a satiric pendant to *Tannhäuser* in 1844. We shall therefore treat it, together with that work, in our next volume.[1]

[1] "Tannhäuser and The Mastersingers of Nuremberg," Vol. IV. of this series.

These two works were completed and performed, under King Ludwig's patronage, at Munich—*Tristan* in 1865 and *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* in 1868—but the *Ring* trilogy had to wait until the Bayreuth Festival-Playhouse was built, in 1876.

Although the *Tristan* drama was designed, as to its form and dimensions, to fit the requirements of conventional operatic routine, it is wholly characteristic of its creator's absolute and unflinching sincerity and earnestness that there are no concessions whatever to popular taste in the drama itself. It is tragedy through and through, with nothing but the almost unearthly beauty of the marvellous music to mitigate the strain upon the hearer.

In his treatment of this primeval love-story Wagner has had to suffer from the manner in which other Western poets—who were neither dramatists nor true mystics—have dealt with it. Let it be understood, therefore, at the outset, that his poem is similar only in name and certain details. Other writers have already fully compared the various Western versions and accounts with Wagner's, and

their work serves to show quite clearly that he has proceeded on entirely different lines, which cannot be thoroughly understood without some knowledge of Persian and Oriental philosophy and symbolism[1] (see *post*, p. 123).

Wagner reduces the story to the simplest details, entirely discarding the unessential and objectionable adventures with which the Western versions abound. Maurice Kufferath (Director of the *Théatre de la Monnaie* at Brussels), to whom we owe one of the most scholarly and sympathetic studies that has appeared on this drama, remarks that "The present value to us of these diverse versions is that they throw into greater relief the poetic art of Wagner, who follows none of these contradictory tales implicitly, but gathers from each the most striking features. These he groups, condenses, and weaves into so logical and coherent a whole, that it forms, in fact, a new version, the true heart of the legend; a version so

[1] We have already referred in a previous Volume (II.) of this series, entitled "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail" (pp. 180, 181), to the extraordinary scope of Wagner's studies in Eastern as well as Western literature and mythology.

innately right, so natural and so human that we seem to rediscover in it the original, primitive tradition."[1]

It is in this respect, therefore, that Wagner soars far above his contemporaries, not only in purity of purpose, but also in power of selection and sheer constructive skill, poetic and dramatic. As with all his works, it is a fundamental ethical aim which has determined the main features of his dramatic poem. And here we desire to emphasise the falseness of the view which, in the face of all that Wagner has written to the contrary, obstinately persists in taking his Art apart from his Ethics; simply because the beauty of the vehicle is admired, but the truths thereby conveyed are distasteful, or misunderstood.

From the inception of *The Flying Dutchman* we find Wagner continually occupied with the problems of life, and treating his Art-Works as a means of helping his fellow-men to solve those problems. In this he falls into line with all the truly great men the world has ever known; and in our interpretation of the

[1] *Le Théatre de R. Wagner* (*de Tannhaeuser à Parsifal*). *Tristan et Iseult.* Third Edition. Brussels, 1894.

Ring drama we have shown the close relation between Wagner and Æschylus in this respect.[1] The fact is too often lost sight of, that Wagner's genius was essentially *classic and mythic*. It was modern only in the form of his music and the setting of the play itself. In the happy phrase of Mr. Tighe Hopkins when reviewing our *Ring* book, he was "an ancient Greek revisiting the glimpses of the moon in modern Germany."

It is in the idea of a longing for Death associated with Love, that Wagner makes his most definite departure from other Western versions and clearly indicates his sympathy with Eastern thought. This idea, commonly attributed to Schopenhauer's influence, appears in Wagner's writings long before he had even so much as heard of Schopenhauer, who was, in fact, first discovered by an Englishman. Thus, at the time of writing *Tannhäuser* he tells us that his revolt against modern Life and modern Art took the form of "a yearning for appeasement in a higher, nobler element; an element which, in its

[1] See "The Ring of the Nibelung: An Interpretation." Second Edition, p. 9 *et seq.*

contrast to the sensual pleasures alone immediately recognisable in the modern Life and modern Art which surrounded me on all sides, could but appear to me in the guise of a pure, chaste, virginal, unapproachable and unreachable element of Love. What, in fine, could this love-yearning, the noblest thing my heart could feel—what other could it be than a longing for release from the Present, for absorption into an element of infinite Love, a love not to be found on earth and reachable through the gates of Death alone?" (*Prose Works*, vol. i. pp. 322, 323).

In these words the central theme of the *Tristan* drama is described with unmistakable clearness; and again, towards the close of 1854, after his first reading of Schopenhauer's "The World as Will and Idea," he writes to Liszt: "His chief idea, the final negation of the desire of life, is terribly serious, but it shows the only salvation possible. To me of course that thought was not new, and, indeed it can be conceived by no one for whom it did not pre-exist; but this philosopher was the first to place it clearly before me" ("Wagner-Liszt Correspondence," vol. ii. p. 53).

Students of Wagner's Prose Works will be aware how frequently the main ideas of his dramas are thus foreshadowed in essays written many years earlier. Further light is thrown on this interesting point in a letter written to Frau Wesendonk, from Venice, in January 1859,[1] when he was scoring the Second Act of *Tristan*. After describing the peculiarity of the poet's intuition in grasping beforehand what is only learnt by others through experience, he goes on to say: "It will then be the greatest marvel when this essential something which has been perceived beforehand, at length begins to form a part of his own experience. This Idea will then play an important part in the form of this experience; the purer and more elevated this Idea has been, so much the more unworldly and incomparable that experience will be. It will purify his will, his æsthetic interest will become a moral one, and the highest moral consciousness will be added to the highest poetical Idea. Then it will become his task to realise it

[1] *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonk, Tagebuchblätter und Briefe*, 1853–1871. Berlin, 1904. (See *post*, p. 135 *et seq.*)

in the moral world; he will thereby be led by the same intuition which, as a perception of the æsthetic Idea, prompted him to represent this Idea in a work of art, and fitted him for the experience. . . .

"I always used to be so much in advance of my experiences in my poetical conceptions that I must consider my moral development to have been brought about and determined by these conceptions. The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Nibelungen, Wodan,[1] were all of them in my brain before they were in my experience. Perhaps you can feel for yourself in what a wonderful relation I now stand to Tristan. I say openly—because it is a fact that does not belong to the world, but to the consecrated spirit—that never did an Idea become so definitely an experience. How far both predestined themselves mutually constitutes such a delicate and wonderful relation that from the ordinary standpoint it is sure to be hopelessly misunderstood."

The mutual predestination of which

[1] This was the original spelling. Wotan was at first a separate figure in Wagner's mind, apart from the *Nibelungen*. See his essay "The Wibelungen: World-History as told in Saga," *Prose Works*, vol. vii.

Wagner here speaks will be better understood, if we remind the reader that at this period he was deeply interested in Buddhism (see *post*, p. 135), especially the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma. In the preface to our Interpretation of *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin*, we give a passage from the Wesendonk correspondence, in which he discusses these works in the light of those ideas, and suggests that "Elsa, in her reincarnation, would rise to the height of Lohengrin." So, in *Tristan*, it is evident that he regards the lovers as having predestined themselves to their present relation by their actions in a previous existence. The connection between this drama and those of *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* thus becomes a profoundly interesting study for those who have the time and inclination to dive deeply into the wonderful mysteries of Wagner's genius. We find him telling Liszt, that in order to understand *The Victors* (*Die Sieger*), one of the forerunners of *Parsifal*, he "must have first digested Tristan, especially the third act"; and in the Wesendonk correspondence he says that the sufferings of

Amfortas in *Parsifal*, represent "my Tristan of the third act with an unimagined working-out" (see *post*, p. 106).

Another very interesting connection with *Lohengrin* is revealed in his Essay "Zukunftsmusik" (*Prose Works*, vol. iii. pp. 330, 331), where Wagner describes how the fatal power of doubt, which had delayed Elsa's evolution, also beset him in his own Art-Work; but, he adds, "all doubt forsook me when at last I gave myself up to Tristan. Here, in absolute faith I plunged into the profoundest depths of the soul and fashioned its outward semblance from the inmost centre of that realm. Life and Death; the whole meaning and existence of the outer world, here depend entirely on the hidden mysteries of the soul. It is the desire of the inmost soul itself that brings about the affecting action of the drama, and it enters the light of Day precisely as it was shaped beforehand in that inner shrine."

He then proceeds to give a very important explanation concerning the poem and its relation to the music, pointing out that in his early work, *The Flying Dutch-*

man, he designed the verses so that they might be stretched to any length demanded by the operatic melody, by continued repetition of words and phrases. In *Tristan*, however, there was none of this word-repetition to be found, "but the weft of words and verses foreordains the whole dimensions of the melody, *i.e.* the structure of that melody is already erected by the poet"; and he adds that this method imparts to the musical setting a wealth and inexhaustibility which could otherwise never even be imagined. Everyone who has heard this work performed, or has even studied the score only, must acknowledge the absolute truth of these remarks.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Wagner considered it inadvisable to publish the *Tristan* poem by itself. He explains, in a letter to Frau Wesendonk, how radical is the difference, both in arrangement and execution, between a poem wholly wedded to music and a purely poetical drama. That, if the former is considered from the same standpoint as the latter, its real significance will remain unrevealed until the musical

language steps in. To the music, he explains, can be relegated the expression of those numerous details which are necessary to render an ideal subject seizable by the popular mind, but which in the purely poetical drama must be expressed in words. Hence, one cannot get a fair impression of Wagner's dramatic poems by reading them apart from the music; and those who attempt to criticise them from that standpoint are doing him a great injustice.

Nevertheless the *Tristan* poem is exceedingly fine, considered by itself. It is a mixture of the alliterative *Stabreim* which Wagner found so suitable for his *Ring of the Nibelung*, and end-rhyme. We give a typical example—the great Death Song in the Second Act, with Mr. Alfred Forman's English version:—

So starben wir,
um ungetrennt,
ewig einig,
ohne End',
ohn' Erwachen,
ohne Bangen,
namenlos
in Lieb' umfangen,
ganz uns selbst gegeben
der Liebe nur zu leben.

So should we die
that ne'er again
our souls might suffer
parting's pain,—
that unawakened,
unforbidden,
for reach of name
too deeply hidden,
our beings we might blend
in love without an end.

If this passage is examined in the vocal score it will be seen how admirably this form of verse lends itself to musical treatment. Another point to notice is that, with few exceptions, every syllable has a note to itself, thus greatly enhancing the distinctness of enunciation which Wagner considered of the first importance; in fact, he laid more stress upon making the words understandable to the audience than upon mere beauty of tone. He was wont to get actors to *speak* the parts to his singers, in order to teach them this clearness of enunciation.

There are also some interesting references to the music in the Wesendonk letters. In describing the method by which he endeavoured to convey the meaning of so profound a subject as *Tristan* to the average mind, Wagner writes: "I now recognise that the peculiar tissue of my music—always, of course, in the closest connection with the poetical design—which my friends regard as so novel and important, owes its construction to a most delicate sense of feeling, prompting me to link together the extreme moods (*Stimmungen*) by

intimately connecting all the moments of the transition between them.

"My most delicate and profound art I would like to call that of Transition (*Uebergang*), since the whole fabric of my art consists of these transitions. An abrupt or hurried effect has become distasteful to me; it is often necessary and inevitable, but even then it ought not to occur unless such a careful preparation has been made for the sudden transition that the mood seems actually to demand it. Undoubtedly my greatest achievement in the art of the most delicate and gradual transition is the grand scene in the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*. The beginning of this scene portrays the most intense emotions of abounding life,—the end the holiest and deepest longing for death. These are the pillars; now see, my child, how I have woven a bond that leads from one pillar to the other. This, then, is the secret of my musical form—a form which, I boldly assert, embraces every detail with such harmony and clearness of development as hitherto has never been conceived."

In another letter to the same correspondent occurs a passage peculiarly

interesting in view of the criticism with which the musical score of *Tristan* was greeted on its first appearance. He says: "The Tristan is, and remains a marvel to me. I am more and more unable to understand how I could produce such a thing. In perusing it I had to open my eyes and ears very wide indeed. How terribly I shall have to suffer for this work some day, when I have it performed in its entirety. I can clearly foresee an unheard-of suffering, for I must not conceal from myself the fact that I have greatly exceeded the limits of our theatrical régime. Performers so wonderfully gifted as to be equal to the task are very rarely born" (see *post*, p. 142).

Wagner's meaning here is evidently two-fold. We have seen from his other references to the drama how intimate and sacred it was to him; and we can well understand how intensely painful to him must have been an ordinary performance in a conventional theatre. It is curious, too, that just as he was haunted by a dread of not being able to finish *Tannhäuser*, so in these intimate letters he writes: "I notice a fatalistic opposition

against the finishing of *Tristan*, but that cannot force me to work at it more hurriedly. On the contrary, I work at it as though I had nothing more to do for the rest of my life. The result is that it grows more beautiful than anything I have done before; the smallest phrase has for me the significance of a whole act, such is the care with which I execute it."

Wagner was always a remarkably just and impartial judge of his own work, and his estimate of *Tristan* is fully endorsed by the most competent authorities of the present day. It is undoubtedly, in some respects, the most perfect flower of his unique genius.

Now it will have been gathered from the foregoing extracts from the Master's writings, that in this particular work the music carries so much of the inner meaning that it is necessary to examine it somewhat fully. As the present volume is devoted to but one Work of moderate dimensions, we are fortunately enabled to do this. Moreover, in checking the existing "Musical Guides" by the orchestral score, we have found that none of them are complete, or in entire

agreement with Wagner's own writings. In attempting a fuller analysis we are only too conscious that a much larger volume than this would be necessary to do the work thoroughly; we have therefore had to be content with a brief reference to the more important instances where the orchestral web of motives illuminates the dramatic poem.

We are aware that there are earnest Wagnerians who deprecate any attempt at analysis or interpretation,[1] especially what they call "the arbitrary labelling of motives" which, they assert, was disapproved of by Wagner himself. But we have already shown in our two previous volumes—and we do so again in the present one—that the Master himself not infrequently quotes specific motives in his writings; and even goes so far as to label some of them, *e.g.* the Warning motive in *Lohengrin*. No doubt there are exceptionally gifted people who are capable of the complex mental feat of understanding such a work as *Tristan* by witnessing one or two performances; but for the great

[1] See *post*, p. 124, for the poet Jámí's Interpretation of his "Salámán and Absál."

majority a preliminary study of a reasonably accurate dramatic and musical interpretation is of the greatest assistance. If this fact had not been borne in upon us very strongly we certainly should not have undertaken the not inconsiderable labour involved in preparing these brief but extremely condensed studies.

A striking confirmation of our own experience is given by Professor Lavignac, in his valuable treatise on Wagner's Music-Dramas.[1] He describes how he went to a Bayreuth festival having made a careful study of *Parsifal*, knowing *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* fairly well, but entirely ignorant of *Tristan and Isolde*. The result was that, whereas the performances of *Parsifal* were to him "two days of the most pure and never-to-be-forgotten happiness," and he was able to appreciate all the humour and pathos of Wagner's only comedy; of *Tristan* he understood "nothing at all, nothing, absolutely nothing. It takes a certain amount of

[1] "The Music-Dramas of Richard Wagner and his Festival Theatre in Bayreuth." By Albert Lavignac, Professor of Harmony at the Conservatoire of Paris. Trans. from the French by Esther Singleton. London, 1898.

courage to confess these things," he adds, "especially when one has subsequently succeeded in penetrating the innumerable beauties of *Tristan and Isolde*; but I wish my sad example to be of service to others, and therefore it is necessary to relate it" (pp. 73, 74).

Permission to cite the various musical motives has been kindly given by Messrs. Breitkopf and Haertel, owners of the copyright. We are also indebted to certain translations by Mr. W. Ashton Ellis, and English versions of the poem by Messrs. Alfred Forman and Frederick Jameson.

The following abbreviations have been used to indicate the instrumentation: Vls. (Violins), Fl. (Flutes), B. (Bassoons), Ob. (Oboes), Cl. (Clarinets), Cb. (Contrabassi), Celli. (Violoncelli), Eng.H. (English Horn), Tpts. (Trumpets), Tromb. (Trombones).

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

1. INTRODUCTORY

2. THE DRAMA

ACT I

ACT II

ACT III

1. INTRODUCTORY

"THE life of man is evolution in egoism and putting-off thereof again in favour of the generality.

"Until maturity, man comprehends Nature only with reference to himself: every impression from Nature goes up into his egoism, for the still-ripening merely receives; only the received is comprehensible to him, and only as regards himself, his Me itself; so far as Nature lies outside him, it therefore is nothing to him, and only his I is something. But when man divests himself of self again in love, after attained maturity, then only does Nature become aught to him, in measure as he sinks himself into her; for through love he goes outside himself and finds himself again in his antithesis. Whence also the understanding of Nature first through love."[1]—*Prose Works*, vol. viii., "Jesus of Nazareth."

[1] Cf. *Tristan*, Act III.—*In des Welt-Athems wehendem All* [rendered by Mr. Jameson as:—"In the moving wave of the whole world's breath"—].

Parsifal, Act III.—*Sieh', es lacht die Aue!* ["—Lo! how laughs the field," in Mr. Alfred Forman's translation].

I. INTRODUCTORY

AMONG the many versions of the birth and parentage of Tristan, the hero of Wagner's drama, that one which makes him the son of Blanchefleur of Cornwall—the sister of King Marke—and the Breton knight, Rivalin, is the most generally accepted. Like Siegfried and other mythical heroes, his father is killed in battle, and his mother survives only long enough to bring him into the world.[1] Thus it is that he receives a name which designates him as the child of sorrow, for though the name Tristan has many derivations, Wagner uses it in its old French meaning.

Reared at his father's castle in Karéol (Brittany) by a faithful seneschal, he becomes—under his preceptor, Kurwenal—famous for his personal fascination, great

[1] See Vol. I. of this series—"The Ring of the Nibelung: An Interpretation," p. 85.

strength and courage, and his skill in minstrelsy. When he has come to man's estate he is kidnapped by a Norwegian ship which is eventually wrecked on the coast of Cornwall, close to King Marke's castle of Tintagel; and thus, in the guise of a shipwrecked stranger, he comes to his uncle's court. Although at first unaware of their relationship, the King conceives a great affection for the unknown minstrel, whose skill excites the admiration of all. Later, so runs the legend, he is recognised as the nephew of King Marke and is proclaimed by him as his heir in Cornwall.

Now the country had long lain under the obligation of paying tribute to Ireland, collected every year by Morold, champion of that country, who was so renowned for his strength and prowess that no Cornish Knight had dared to accept the alternative of mortal combat which he scornfully offered. Tristan, however, stung by his insults, refused the tribute and offered to meet the Irish champion. The combat, reluctantly consented to by King Marke, is said to have taken place on the island of St. Sanson—one of the Scilly group—

and was long and terrible. In the end Tristan succeeded in slaying Morold by so violent a sword-cut on the head that a fragment of the weapon was left in his adversary's skull.

In pride and derision he sends the head to Ireland as "tribute"; but he has himself received a grievous wound, inflicted by Morold's poisoned sword. In the sufferings which he endures, which none can assuage, he recalls the words of Morold, who had told him of the healing balms prepared by Isolde, Princess of Ireland,[1] renowned for her skill in that art. But as slayer of Morold his life would be forfeit were he to seek healing at her hands as Tristan of Cornwall, nephew of King Marke; so disguising himself as a minstrel, he goes alone in a small boat to Dublin, with nothing but his harp and his sword. Reversing the syllables of his name he announces himself as Tantris and captivates everyone with the sweetness of his minstrelsy, as he had done at

[1] A village near Dublin is known as Chapelizod to this day, and one of the towers on the old city wall in Dublin is called Isolde's Tower (see Gilbert's "History of Dublin," vol. ii.). There is also a house in Kilkenny called Chapelizod after the Izod family who reside there.

Tintagel. Princess Isolde, who had been trained in the arts of healing and of magic by her mother, undertakes to heal the minstrel's wound. But in the head of Morold, sent by Tristan as "tribute" from Cornwall, Isolde had found a fragment of steel which, now divining the truth, she instantly fits in a gap which she discovers in the stranger's sword. Enraged, she raises the weapon to avenge the Irish Champion's death; but the sick man silently looks into her eyes, and the sword falls harmless to the ground.

This fateful Look is the point from which the whole of Wagner's drama evolves; and is distinctively his own invention, being found in none of the other versions of the legend. It reveals to the finer perceptions of Isolde that they are mutually predestined for one another, as Wagner points out in a letter already quoted (see *ante*, p. 10). It is something infinitely deeper and more significant than what is commonly known as "love at first sight." It indicates an identity of soul, the meaning of which becomes clearer as the drama unfolds itself. In that moment Isolde knows that her fate is bound up with that of Tristan;

but she also knows that he is, as yet, unconscious for his part of the secret she has read in his eyes.[1] In silence she heals his wound; in silence and safety he departs for Cornwall. Still blind to the mysterious relation he bears to Isolde, he loudly extols her charms to his uncle, and will not rest content until the good old King permits him to return to Ireland[2] with a fitting escort to bring her back to be his Queen.

The action of Wagner's drama opens while Tristan is bringing Isolde to Cornwall. Concerning the instrumental prelude the Master writes as follows to Frau Wesendonk from Paris, in January 1860: "All that I have gone through means nothing compared with the discovery which I made in the orchestral rehearsal of my concert. It has determined the

[1] "Sight, sight," says Wagner, "real sight is what all lack." See Appendix, p. 141, for what he says concerning the power of trained "sight" for piercing the outward appearance of things and perceiving the inner soul.

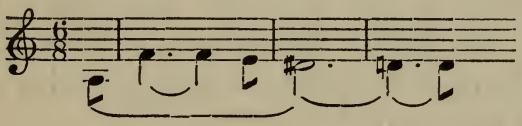
[2] It is during this second visit that, according to one version of the story, Tristan succeeds in slaying a dragon that had long devastated the land. This incident is not touched upon by Wagner, but is of interest as another point of similarity with Siegfried (see "The Ring of the Nibelung: An Interpretation," p. 85).

entire remainder of my life, and its consequences will now wholly dominate me. I had the Prelude of *Tristan* played for the first time,—it was as if scales had fallen from my eyes, and revealed to me how great is the gulf which the last eight years have caused me to place between the world and myself. This little prelude was so incomprehensibly new to the musicians that I had straightway to lead my people from note to note, as to the discovery of hidden precious stones. Bülow, who was present, confessed to me that the performance of this piece, which had been tried in Germany, had only been received by the public in good faith, but had remained wholly incomprehensible to them. I succeeded in making this prelude intelligible alike to the orchestra and to the public, indeed I am sure that the deepest impression has been made; but do not ask me *how* that was achieved. Suffice it that it is now very clear to me that I must not think of creating anything further before I have filled up the big chasm behind me."

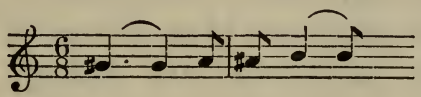
The Prelude opens with a remarkable

phrase which is really a combination of the two most important motives in the drama. The first, grief-laden and resigned, is peculiarly expressive of the nature of Tristan :—

SORROW MOTIVE.



The second motive is thus referred to by Wagner in a letter to Frau Wesendonk, written from Paris in March 1860: "Everything is foreign to me, and I often turn with longing towards the land of Nirvâna. But Nirvâna quickly changes into Tristan. You know the Buddhist Cosmogony. A mist veils the clearness of heaven. [He then writes in the following motive]:—



It swells and grows denser, until at length the whole world stands again before me in an impenetrable compactness."

Now in the course of the drama we

shall find that this simple chromatic sequence occurs every time the magical knowledge of either Isolde or her mother is mentioned (see *post*, p. 49, "O tamed Art of the Sorceress" — *O zahme Kunst der Zauberin*). It also occurs in the beginning of the Second Act when Isolde speaks of Frau Minne as "The Queen with heart of matchless height, who brings by will the worlds to light."[1]

The conclusion is therefore unavoidable, and it is most important to make it clear at this stage of our study, that Wagner proceeds on higher lines than the romantic poets to whom we have already referred. In his hands *Tristan and Isolde* becomes something infinitely wider than a story of personal human love, although that lesser force is contained within the greater. He shows us beyond mistake that in this motive he intends in the larger sense to convey the abstract idea of the Will which brings the universe into being. In the individual it manifests as human love; and the greatness of Wagner's work

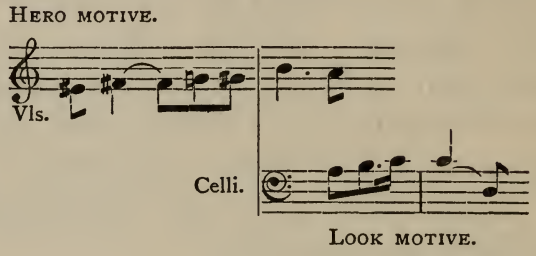
[1] This is Mr. Alfred Forman's admirable rendering of: *Des kühnsten Muthes Königin des Welten-Werdens Walterin . . .*

consists in his demonstration of the higher aspect of human love as leading upward to the divine (see *post*, p. 88). Therefore the "magic" of Isolde and her mother is something very different from what is commonly understood by that term.[1]

This second motive, then, may be looked upon as being especially connected with the nature of Isolde; and, in combination with the first, expresses at the very outset the essential characteristics of the hero and heroine.

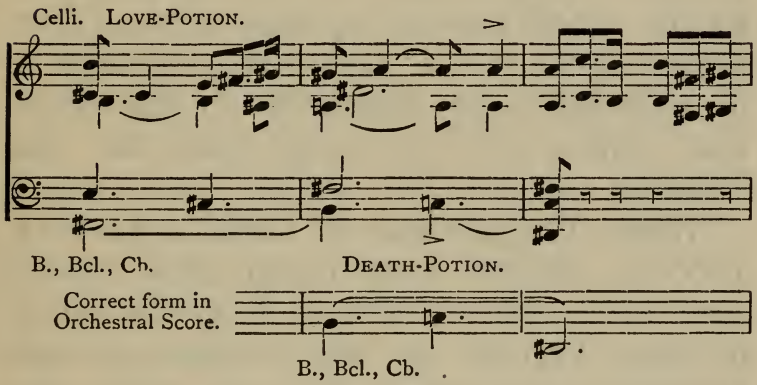
[1] In a learned work entitled *Histoire de la Magie*, by P. Christian, *Ancien Bibliothécaire au Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Cultes* (Paris 1840), we find the following: "Magic, or rather *Magisme*, if we will take the trouble to trace it back to its most ancient source, can no longer be confused with the superstitions which mar its dignity. . . . Magic derives its name from the Chaldean word *Maghdim*, which means wisdom, and includes that which we understand by the term philosophy." We may remind the reader that many of the princesses of olden times had the custody of higher knowledge of this nature. Such a one Isolde undoubtedly was, and is so treated by Wagner in this drama.

A second pair of motives represent Tristan as Hero, and the fateful Look which he cast upon Isolde when she raised the sword to kill him.



The meaning of the Look motive will become clearer in the course of the First Act; meanwhile it is firmly impressed on the memory by continued repetition throughout the Prelude. Closely allied to it are the motives of the Love-Potion and the Death-Potion (see *post*, p. 59). Both are characterised by the descending interval of a seventh, the first being a major seventh in the treble and the latter a minor seventh in the bass. This similarity is due to the close association of Love and Death in this drama which has been already referred to (see *ante*, p. 7).

Curiously enough, neither Von Bülow nor Kleinmichel seem to have recognised this motive in the Prelude; for in their pianoforte arrangements they both treat it as though it were merely a bass harmony; thus:—



It will be observed that the motive has been divided by tying the first note (B) to F♯ in the previous bar, and accenting the middle D♮, while the third note (D♯) is only given as a minim; whereas in the full score as shown beneath it, the D♯ is sustained throughout the bar by the three bassoons and bass clarionet, the contrabassi only

ceasing on the first beat of the bar. It is a remarkable illustration of what may be missed in Wagner's scores, even by musicians of the highest technical skill, when they are studied purely from the musical standpoint. Moreover, Hans Von Wolzogen, who calls it the "Fate motive," in pointing out its resemblance to the Look motive, speaks of it as first occurring in Act I. Scene iv., although it is sounded very distinctly no less than four times in the early part of the Prelude.

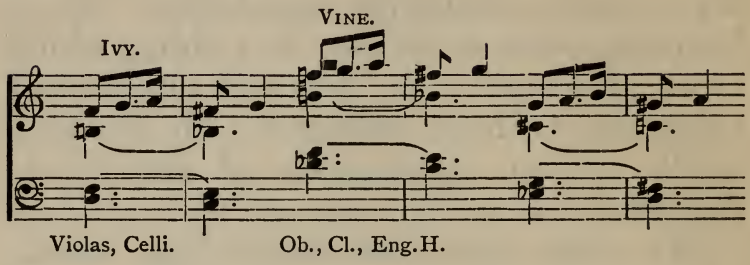
When Wagner was in Paris in January 1860 he desired very much, as we have seen (see *ante*, p. 31), to hear the effect of this Prelude on the orchestra, and therefore he wrote it out with the arrangement of Isolde's *Liebestod* which closes the drama, now so familiar to all concert-goers. In sending a copy to Frau Wesendonk he writes: "You know Hans [Von Bülow] wished to perform the Prelude to Tristan last winter, and asked me to write a conclusion for it. Then I could think of nothing; it seemed so impossible to me that I at once declined. Since then, I have written the third act,

and I have found a complete conclusion of the whole. . . . I send you this mysterious pacifying conclusion for a birthday present, as the best thing which I can give you. . . . You will understand better what I have written for my Parisian public as an explanation of the whole Prelude."

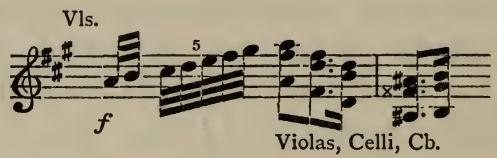
We here give the concluding words of this "explanation": "it is the bliss of quitting life, of being-no-more, of last redemption into that wondrous realm from which we wander farthest when we strive to enter it by fiercest force. Shall we call it Death? Or is it not Night's wonder-world, whence—as the story says—an ivy and a vine sprang up in close embrace o'er Tristan and Isolde's grave!" (*Prose Works*, vol. viii., "Sketches and Fragments." See also *post*, p. 147 and cover design).

"You will recognise again, in the music," continues Wagner in his letter to Frau Wesendonk, "ivy and vine branches, when you hear it played by the orchestra, where string and wind instruments are heard alternately." The following is the passage referred to, and will be seen

to be a development of the Look motive :—

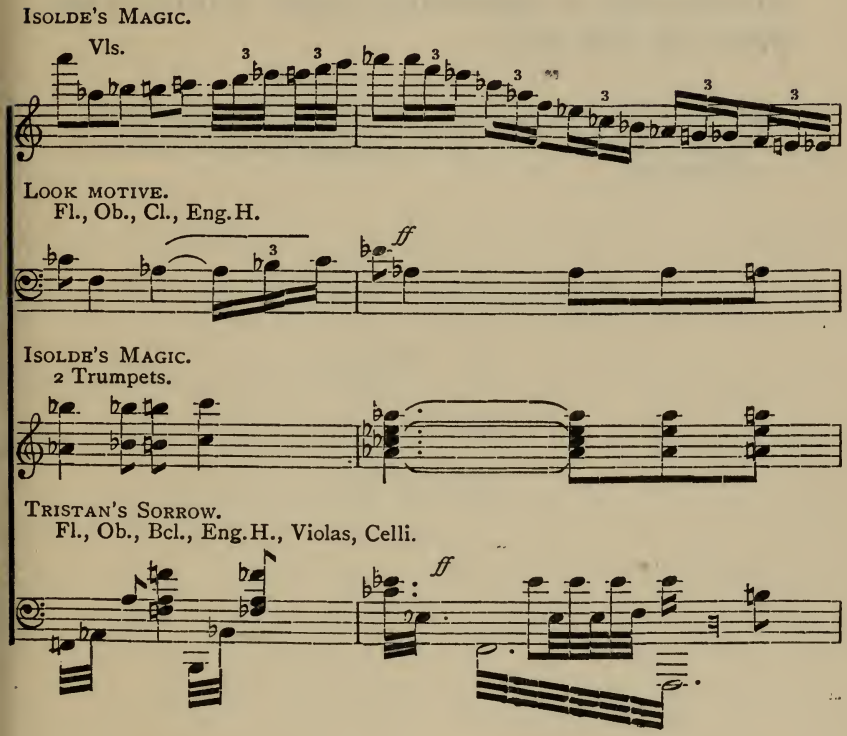


These figures alternating with the Look motive and the recurrence of the Death-Potion in the bass lead up to the strenuous figure of the Longing for Death :—



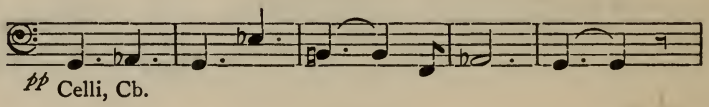
The motives of Tristan's Sorrow and Isolde's Magic reappear in combination with this, and then the Look motive, which is carried forward with magnificent effect upon a stream of sound ; the whole culminating in a tremendous climax which produces an harmonic effect greatly admired as such by musicians. Yet when we come

to look into it, it is found to be a perfectly natural combination of the three motives just mentioned :—



This climax is described by Wagner as expressing "the most resolute attempt to find the breach unbarring to the heart a path into the sea of the eternal bliss of love." But the effort is vain, and the Prelude dies away in tender repetitions

of some of the motives already heard. As the curtain rises on the First Act the following bass figure is sounded, which afterwards is associated with Morold (see *post*, pp. 58, 62) :—



2. THE DRAMA

ACT I

ACT II

ACT III

2. THE DRAMA

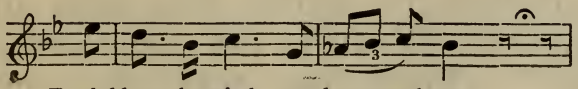
ACT I

"WITH the sketch of 'Tristan and Isolde' I felt that I was not really leaving the circle of the poetical and mythical ideas which my Nibelungen work had opened out to me. . . . For the grand concordance of all sterling Myths as revealed to me by my studies, had sharpened my eyesight for the wondrous variations which appeared in this discovered link. Such a one confronted me with fascinating clearness in Tristan's relation to Isolde, as compared with Siegfried's to Brünnhilde. . . . Their complete similarity consists in this: both Tristan and Siegfried, in bondage to an illusion which makes this deed of theirs unfree, woo for another their own eternally predestined bride, and in the false relation hence arising find their doom. . . . What in the one work could only be expressed with decisive violence, in the other becomes a Content of infinite variety; and this it was that attracted me to treat the subject, at just this time; namely, as a supplementary Act of the great Nibelungen-myth, a mythos compassing the whole relations of a world."—*Prose Works*, vol. iii., "Epilogue to the 'Nibelung's Ring.'"

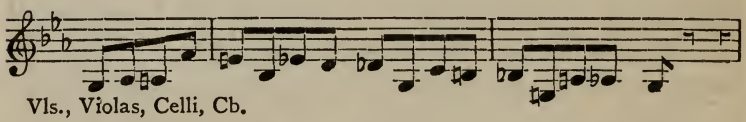
2. THE DRAMA

ACT I

THE action of the drama opens on board the ship in which Tristan is bringing Isolde from Ireland to Cornwall as bride-elect of King Marke. She is seen, in a curtained-off space on the deck, reclining on a couch in an attitude of deep dejection, her waiting-woman, Brangäne, in attendance. The voice of a young sailor is heard aloft, reminding us of the Steersman in *The Flying Dutchman*: "Westward sweeps the eye; Eastward glides the ship. Fresh blows the wind on homeward way; My Irish maid, where dost thou stay?" Part of his song is afterwards used as the Sea motive—



The Look motive gives us the key to Isolde's mood, as she starts up with the angry cry: "Who dares to mock me?" For since that Look in Tristan's eyes revealed to her their common destiny, he has sought to condemn her to a living death in an alliance with his uncle. The motive expressive of her wrath and deep agitation is derived from that of Tristan's Sorrow:—



To the accompaniment of the Sea motive Brangäne tells her that by evening they will reach the shores of Cornwall; but Isolde declares that that shall never be; and a portion of the Death-Potion motive reveals her real resolve. It is followed by a new form of the Sea motive as she cries: "Degenerate race, unworthy your fathers! Oh, mother, to whom hast thou given the power to rule the sea and the storm?" Then we hear the motive

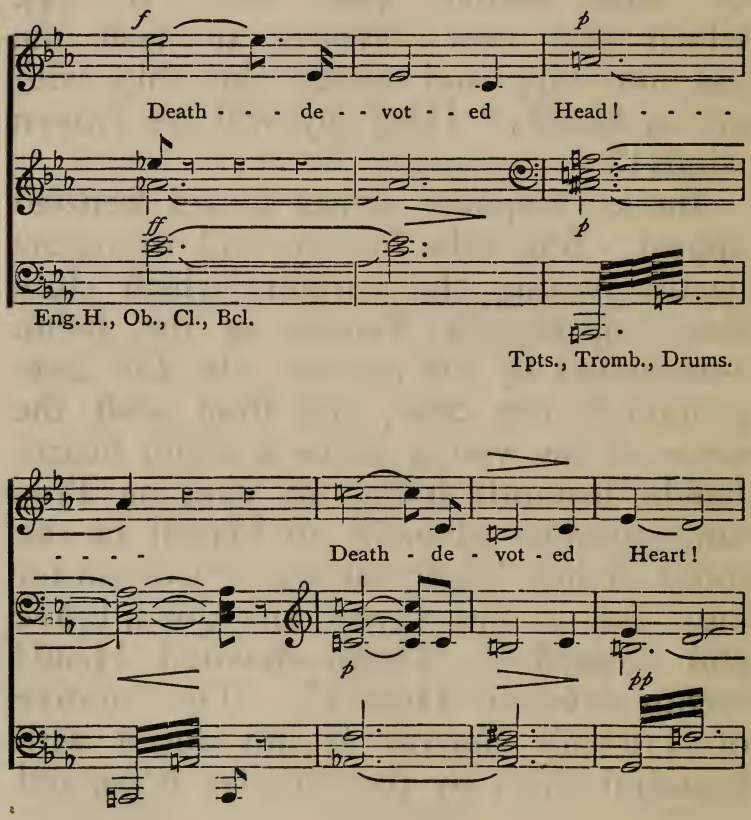
of Isolde's Magic[1] as she continues: "O tamed art of the sorceress, that now but healing draughts can brew." It is the power of the Will, indicated by this motive (see *ante*, p. 34), which she now invokes to lash the sea into fury and wreck the ship with all on board: "Hear my will, ye craven winds!"

But no response comes to her frenzied appeal. She calls for air, and Brangäne hastily parting the curtains which close them in, reveals Tristan at the helm, surrounded by his retinue. In the foreground is the crew, and from aloft the voice of the young sailor is again heard. Isolde, instantly fixing her eyes on Tristan, murmurs gloomily to herself in the tones of her Magic motive: "Chosen for me,—lost to me,—great and good, brave and coward—; Death-devoted Head! Death-devoted Heart!" The motive of Tristan's Sorrow is introduced with beautiful effect by the English horn, and

[1] The connection in which this motive occurs, both here and subsequently, proves that it is distinctly misleading to label it "desire," or "yearning"—as is frequently done.

the following motive appears at the mention of Death :—

DEATH MOTIVE.



At the word "Head" Isolde faintly indicates, by her gesture, Tristan; at the

word "Heart" herself.[1] In the Second Act the meaning of this action becomes clearer in its relation to the general scheme of symbolism which Wagner has embodied in this drama. The Hero motive of Tristan is linked to the Look motive (see *ante*, p. 36), as Isolde asks Brangäne what she thinks of "the henchman—that hero," who keeps his "look" from hers.

Let us pause here for a moment to consider the present state of the inner relation between Tristan and Isolde. For this is preëminently an introspective work, dealing entirely with the mysteries of human personality. And such of these mysteries as cannot be expressed in words are conveyed by the wonderful orchestral web of motives—a musical language of such clearness as had never been dreamt of before Wagner began his marvellous life-work.

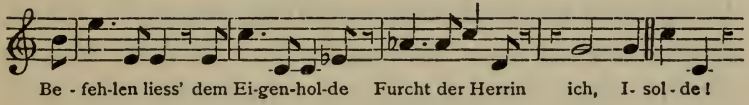
Tristan is represented as the intellectual element, partially blinded by the illusion

[1] See "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail," pp. 170, 171, where we quote a remarkable use of this symbolism on the part of Liszt, in reference to the *Lohengrin* drama.

of the outer world of Day; and Isolde as the intuitional element which is of the inner world of Night; and it will be seen that the whole of the Second Act is concerned with this contrast. In the quotation from the *Prose Works* which faces this Act, Wagner makes the extremely profound remark that Tristan and Siegfried alike fall victims to this fatal "illusion" of the material world: That, blinded thereby, they do a terrible wrong, involving suffering and death; they "woo for another their own eternally predestined bride, and in the false relation hence arising they find their doom." In Tristan this blindness takes the form of a feeling that his uncle is more worthy than he of so rare a nature as Isolde. But now that the wrong is done, now that, in Isolde's words to Brangäne, he has "won a bride as *corpse* for his lord," the power of that ancient destiny which binds his own soul to hers is becoming so strong that he dare not even turn his gaze towards her.

To Isolde, with her inner knowledge, the position is insupportable. She is being dragged into a "purely political marriage"

—to use Wagner's description—by the man whose soul has declared itself to be in unison with her own. It amounts to what the ancients called "a profanation of the Mysteries," and the penalty must be death. Before she bade farewell to Ireland her resolve had been formed, and now, as they approach the shores of Cornwall, she is preparing to put it into execution. Brangäne is charged to deliver a brief and peremptory summons, which is couched in tones similar to the Death motive, commanding Tristan's attendance—



To the modern mind it might seem strange that so proud a nature as Isolde's should tamely submit to so great a profanation. The outer reason is to be found in the custom of the times, when it was quite a recognised usage for such a marriage to be arranged in order to seal a treaty of peace between two countries; but it is the inner reason

which is here by far the more important to consider.

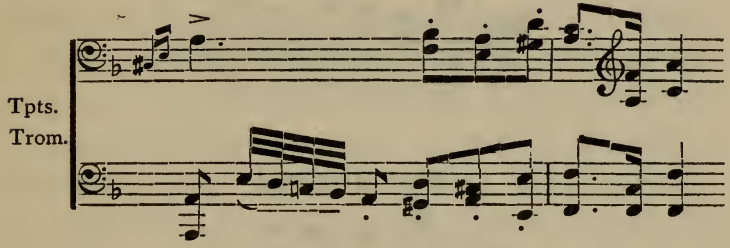
Isolde, as we have seen, stands for the feminine principle of Intuition, which in the material world is a passive force, as opposed to the active (masculine) force of Intellect; but the more we recede from the material world and its influences the more active does this feminine principle in us become. Thus Wagner tells us that the intellectual theories which he formed were continually overthrown by his artistic intuition. In other words, the state of consciousness into which he entered when at work on his Art was so high that Intuition was the prevailing force.[1] It is, therefore, quite natural for Isolde to be silent and unresisting during this worldly traffic; but we now find her beginning to direct the course of events in such a manner as to bring Tristan nearer to her sphere of influence, and eventually to open his eyes to his true destiny.

As Brangäne advances to deliver her message the Sea motive merges into the energetic motive of Kurwenal, Tristan's

[1] See "The Ring of the Nibelung: An Interpretation," pp. 127, 128.

faithful henchman, who warns his master of a message from Isolde.

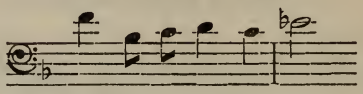
KURWENAL MOTIVE.



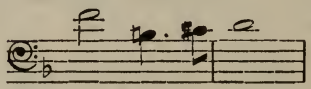
To Brangäne's timid words, that Isolde would have speech with him, Tristan replies evasively that he stands ever ready to serve her; but were he to leave the helm, how could the ship be guided safely to the land of King Marke? Seeing this Brangäne takes courage and repeats, tone for tone, Isolde's command, which stings Kurwenal to boastful and insulting words concerning the death of Morold and the sending of his head as "tribute" to Ireland. His last words are sung to a new motive of considerable importance, especially expressive of Tristan as the Hero surrounded by the glory of the material world; for later on, in the Second Act, we shall see how, by a very simple change, it becomes

the motive of Day (the world of Illusion. See *post*, p. 79):—

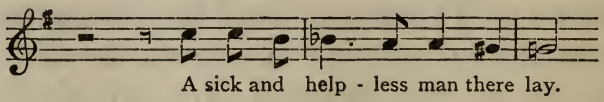
WORLDLY FAME.



DAY MOTIVE.[1]



The ship's crew take up this refrain, as Brangäne retreats in dismay, and closes the curtains behind her, and we hear the descending chromatic sequence of Tristan's Sorrow motive while she delivers her reply to her royal mistress. But Isolde knows all; and, to the continual accompaniment of that motive—now definitely representative of the Wounded Tristan—she recounts bitterly to Brangäne the story of his secret voyage to Ireland, to seek healing at her hands:—



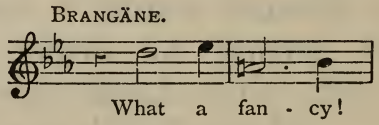
[1] See Act II. p. 71.

At the words: "Isolde's art was known to him," the motive of her Magic reappears, followed by that of the Wounded Tristan, which abruptly changes into his Worldly-Fame motive—just heard in the refrain of Kurwenal's insulting song—as Isolde goes on to tell how the wounded minstrel "Tantris" was revealed to her as Tristan: "From where he rested rose his Look,—not on the sword, not on my hand, he looked into my eyes. His anguish wrung my heart; the sword—I let it fall! The wound by Morold made I healed, that whole and strong he might to home return,—with that Look no more to haunt me." "O wonder!" cries Brangäne, "where were my eyes? That guest whom once I helped to nurse—?"

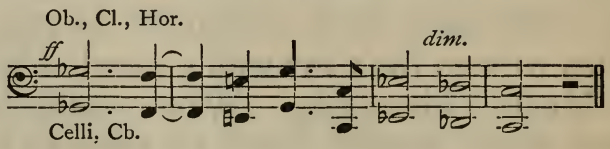
The stormy motive of Isolde's Wrath is heard, as she resumes the story: "He who, as Tantris, I let go unknown, as Tristan boldly back he came; on a gallant ship with lofty deck, Ireland's heiress he comes to woo for Cornwall's wearied King, for Marke, his uncle. Who would have dared while Morold lived to offer us such insult? . . . How boldly Tristan proclaimed what I had held concealed. Her

silence that gave him life, the silence that fended foes' revenge; what silent shelter he owed to her, with her—he betrayed it. . . . Curse thee, traitor! Curse thine head! Vengeance! Death! Death for us both!"

The Wounded Tristan theme gives place to a coaxing melody derived from the motive of Isolde's Magic, as Brangäne innocently tries to soothe her mistress by extolling the honour Tristan bestows upon her in procuring this royal alliance :—

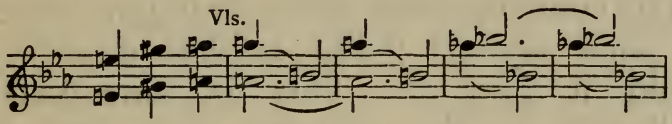


But Isolde only turns her head away, and we hear a very loud and clearly defined motive which seems to have a kinship with the Morold motive (see *post*, p. 62), and also with the final bass notes of the Prelude (see *ante*, p. 42) :—



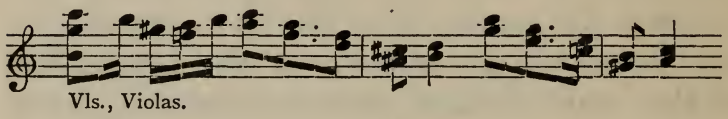
Isolde, who has been staring with gloomy intentness before her while Bran-

gäne sings the praise of King Marke, now murmurs to herself, in the tones of her Magic theme: "Unbeloved by the noblest man, ever to see him near me! How could I bear the anguish?" Brangäne, little dreaming her real thoughts, gently reminds her of the Potion which the thoughtful care of her mother had provided against the curse of a loveless marriage; the descending seventh at the beginning of the Love-Potion motive, occurring over and over again, as she cautiously leads up to her theme :—



Once more Isolde's Magic motive is heard as Brangäne asks: "Know'st thou not thy Mother's Arts? Think'st thou that she who so wisely considers all things would have sent me with thee to a foreign land without counsel?" Still to the same motive Isolde darkly answers: "The Mother's counsel reminds me truly; welcome to me is her art;" and the Death-Potion motive reveals to us her resolve, accompanying the words: "Vengeance

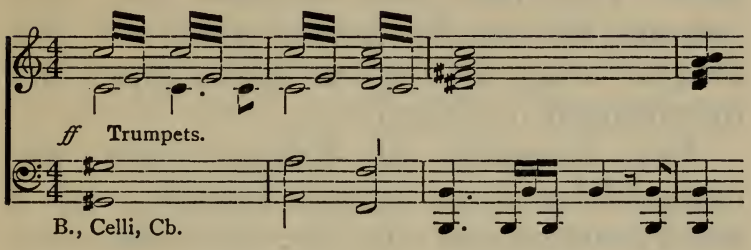
for betrayal,—Rest for the anguished heart!" As Brangäne brings the casket at Isolde's bidding and begins to describe its contents we hear the Love harmonies, and, for the first time since it occurred in the Prelude, the motive of Longing for Death:—



The Love-Potion motive now appears in its complete form while Brangäne selects a phial saying: "The noblest draught I hold it here!" This is immediately followed by the ominous bass tones of the Death-Potion, as Isolde seizes another with the words: "Thou err'st! Upon it deep I carved a sign!" Thus at last she reveals to the terror-stricken maid the death-resolve she had made before they left the shores of Erin.

At this moment the cries of the seamen announce that the voyage nears its end, and Kurwenal enters to bid them prepare for landing. The reply of Isolde is prefaced by a loud fanfare on the trumpets,

combined with a new form of the Death-Potion motive :—

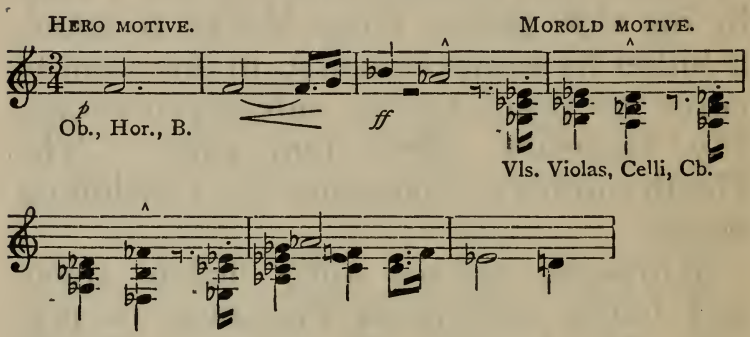


"To Tristan take my greeting and tell him what I say. I will not prepare myself to attend him to the shore, nor will I walk by his side before King Marke to stand, if hither he comes not first, in due form to crave my grace for an unforgiven wrong. My clemency offers him this." The Death motive accompanies her concluding words.

Kurwenal departs with defiant mien, and Isolde commands Brangäne to prepare the draught of peace—of Death. In vain the distraught handmaiden falls on her knees before her mistress; Isolde answers her in her own words, accompanied as before by the Magic motive: "Know'st thou not the Mother's Arts? Think'st thou that she who so wisely

considers all things would have sent me with thee to a foreign land without counsel? For woe and wounds gave she balsam, for deadly poison antidote; for deepest woe, for highest grief, gave she the draught of Death."

The approach of Tristan, now announced by Kurwenal, is heralded by a stately movement in the orchestra, consisting of his Hero motive with which is blended a new one, associated with Morold (see *ante*, p. 58) :—



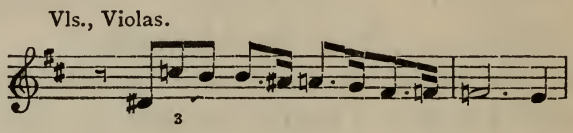
As he enters Isolde's pavilion the Death-Potion motive is heard, and thus the music tells us, before a word in this intensely dramatic scene is spoken, that he—the slayer of Morold—is to drink the draught of Death. To Isolde's questions as to why he had

kept away from her sight and disobeyed her commands he replies evasively, as before: "Custom teaches where I lived, that the bride-beseecher, who brings her home, must keep himself apart." "On what account?" asks Isolde. But Tristan only replies: "Ask the Custom."

The Morold motive is heard again, followed by the Death motive, as she tells him that a blood-debt lies between them for which atonement must be made. Tristan answers that truce was sworn "in open field"; and Isolde's reply is full of subtle meaning: "It was not there I held Tantris hidden, not there that Tristan fell before me. There he stood glorious, bright and strong; but what he swore I did not swear; I had learned the lesson of silence." Then she speaks of that Look which had caused her to spare his life, and pretends—for her present purpose—that she had silently sworn vengeance for Morold.[1] His motive appears in complete form as she speaks of him as her betrothed, whose sword she had blessed.

[1] Like the much-vexed question of Hamlet's madness, there has been some speculation as to whether Isolde's wrath against Tristan is real or simulated.

Another motive heard many times here is evidently derived from Tristan's Sorrow motive, and is associated with the fate planned for him by Isolde, the triplet being first sounded alone several times :—



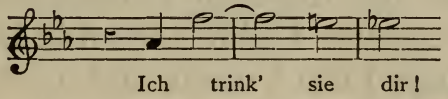
Pale and gloomy, he offers her the sword which once she let fall before his Look, that this time she may carry out her purpose. But this is not Isolde's plan : she has feigned the vengeance for Morold as an excuse for making Tristan drink the Death-Potion, which she now signs to Brangäne to bring.

The shouts of the crew reducing sail rouse Tristan from his dark brooding. To his question : "Where are we?" Isolde replies, with double meaning, "Near the goal![1] [Death motive] Am I to have atonement? What hast thou to tell me?" His reply is full of significance : "The Queen of Silence bids me

[1] "Near to shore" is H. and F. Corder's rendering of *Hart am Ziel*, which entirely fails to convey Isolde's point, and is not even literal.

be silent:—I grasp what she concealed, I conceal what she grasps not."

Again come the shouts of the crew from without, as Isolde takes the Death-Potion from Brangäne and offers it to Tristan, saying with deep earnestness: "Thou hear'st the call? We are at the goal: in a moment we shall stand before King Marke." Echoing the sailors' cry, "Loose the anchor," Tristan gladly accepts "the goodly drink of forgetfulness," since life holds naught but pain and dishonour for him. But ere he can wholly drain the cup Isolde wrests it from him, as the Look motive is twice loudly sounded, crying "Betrayer, I drink to thee," in the tones of his Sorrow motive.[1]



And now, believing themselves to be on the threshold of death, they no longer

[1] Kufferath, who makes an exhaustive analysis of this scene in his admirable book, remarks that "It is sufficient to read Wagner's poem carefully to understand what a subtle and intricate psychological problem this scene presents to us. . . . It must be repeated that, in Wagner's intention, the magic power of the philtre does not play a *physical, but a purely psychological rôle.*"

conceal their true feelings. It is one of Wagner's wonderful moments where speech is silent and the most delicate and consummate acting is required to do justice to the eloquence of the music (see *post*, p. 142). The motives of Tristan's Sorrow and Isolde's Magic are now blended as in the beginning of the Prelude, as they fall into each other's arms oblivious of the arrival of the ship.

In the first transports of their avowal the curtains are parted, revealing a crowd of knights and sailors, and a castle-crowned height close at hand. "Do I live?" asks Isolde, bewildered, as Brangäne advances with the royal robe; — "Ha! which draught was that?" "The Love-draught," confesses the unhappy handmaiden. Unable to execute Isolde's terrible behest she had changed the Potion, and unconsciously thwarted her design for saving Tristan from his fatal delusion. The glare of the world of Day has broken in upon them once more, and amid the blare of trumpets and the bustle of the landing we hear Isolde's Magic motive as she is led away, half-fainting, to meet the King.

2. THE DRAMA

ACT II

"(RELIGION) . . . lives, but only there, where it has its primordial source and sole true dwelling-place; within the deepest, holiest centre (*Innern*) of the Individual; there, whither never yet has reached either conflict of Rationalists and Supranaturalists, or of Clergy and State. For this is the essence of true Religion: that, shunning the cheating show of the Day-tide world, it shines in the Night of the deepest centre of man's soul, with a light quite other than the World-sun's light, and visible nowhence save from out that depth alone."—*Prose Works*, vol. iv., "On State and Religion."

2. THE DRAMA

ACT II

Backward I turn
To Thee, oh! Sacred, Unspeakable Night!
Far away the World
Lies buried as if in some deep grave.

. . . . . .

Praise to the World-Queen,
To the High Herald of the Sacred World,
The Cherisher
Of Holy Love
Thou comest Belovèd!
Night is here.

Hymn to Night.—NOVALIS.

NO definite lapse of time is indicated between the First and Second Acts; and it is especially with regard to this portion of the story that Wagner's treatment differs so notably from other Western versions. The numerous clandestine adventures which only detract from the original meaning of the Legend are here concentrated in one great meet-

ing. Of the material aspect of love we find practically nothing, but we are lifted almost at once into a suprasensual atmosphere—the highest region of thought and emotion.

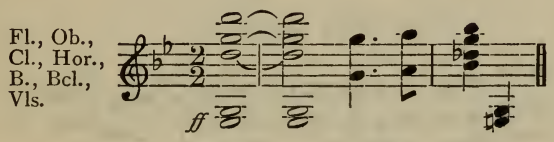
It is clearly to be inferred from subsequent events that the royal nuptials have not yet been celebrated, but that Isolde is resting after the fatigues of the voyage. As it is continually stated by careless writers that Tristan is in love with "his uncle's wife," it is as well to make this point clear, as an example of Wagner's delicate handling of a Legend originally pure, but which has suffered greatly at the hands of later writers (see *post*, p. 92).

Since the drinking of the Love-Potion, Tristan and Isolde have been apart; but she has never relaxed her resolve to win him from the delusive Day, and "take him hence to the Night" of the inner life. The scene is in the garden of the castle, outside Isolde's apartments. The royal party are absent on a night hunt, and Isolde has taken this opportunity of arranging a meeting with Tristan.

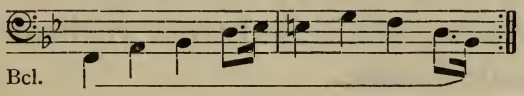
The musical Prelude conveys a perfect

expression of life in all its exuberance, veiled by the shadows of dusk and by the peace of a summer evening. Added to this is the effect of the huntsmen's horns in the distance, to which attention is called in the dramatic situation. The first theme, which breaks like a shrill and menacing cry on the shimmering silence of descending night, is the motive of that terrible Day, from the torment and illusion of which the soul is yearning to flee.

DAY MOTIVE.[1]



Then a motive is heard in the bass, expressing Isolde's expectancy :—

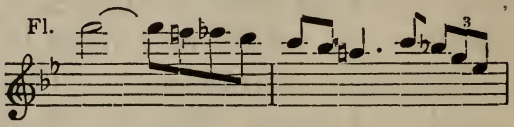


A descending progression in the treble is presently combined with it, which is

[1] A variant of Tristan's Worldly-Fame motive in the First Act (see *ante*, p. 56).

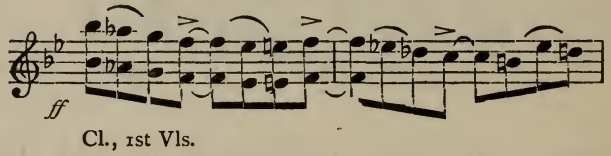
afterwards associated with the Torch used by Isolde as a signal to Tristan.

TORCH MOTIVE.



Then the motive of Isolde's Magic leads up to a remarkable new motive, which will be found later on to represent the idea of Nirvâna,[1] or complete and final liberation from the ties of earthly existence :—

NIRVÂNA MOTIVE.



Thus we see from this short musical passage, that it is by the Magic of Isolde that Tristan will be led to a realisation of that exalted state.

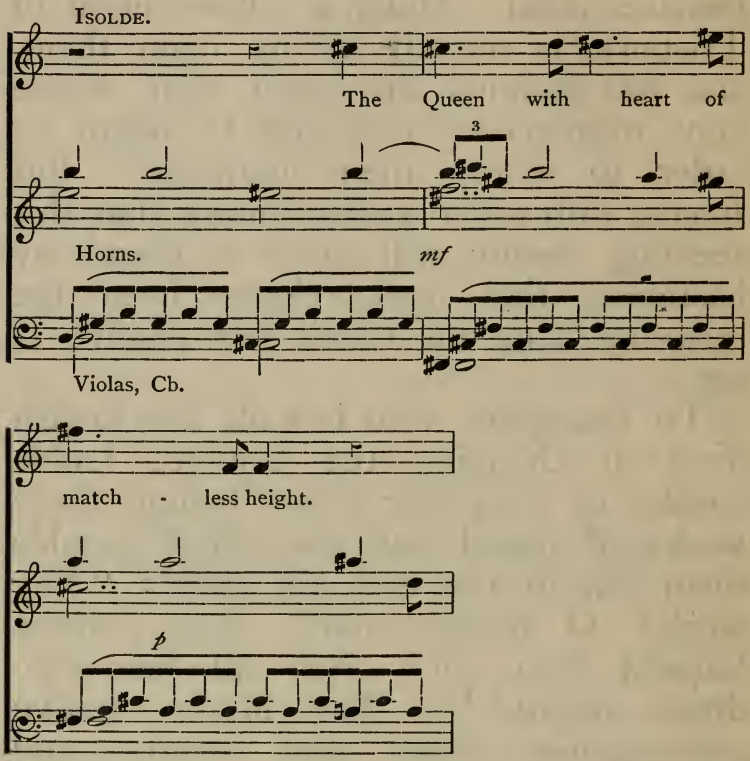
[1] We have already seen from the Wesendonk letters that Wagner had the Buddhist idea of Nirvâna particularly in mind when writing this Drama (see *ante*, p. 33); hence our use of the term to describe this motive, by other commentators simply labelled "Bliss motive," which may mean anything.

While Isolde is waiting for Tristan, Brangäne warns her of the danger which menaces them. Melot, a fellow-knight of Tristan's, is secretly spying upon them, and has planned this night hunt, whose faint horn-echoes can still be heard, in order to entrap them unawares. But Isolde, with wider vision, knows that this seeming enemy will prove a friend, by hastening that final release from the torturing Day on which her resolve is set.

To Brangäne, who bewails her foolish deed in changing the Potions, Isolde speaks of a greater power behind these works of friend and foe, which moulds them all, in the end, for good: "Thy work? O foolish maid! Frau Minne knew'st thou not? Nor all her wondrous might?"[1] The Magic motive accompanies these last words, and then creates a beautiful effect in combination with a figure in the treble which seems to be specially associated with

[1] It is misleading to translate "Frau Minne" as "Love's goddess," and Mr. Alfred Forman wisely retains the German. In quoting Wagner's reference to this motive (see *ante*, p. 34) we have already explained what "Frau Minne" represents.

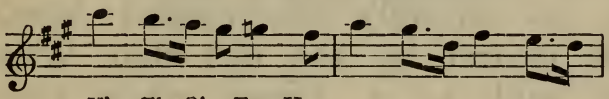
Frau Minne, as Isolde continues: "The Queen with heart of matchless height



who brings by will the worlds to light? Life and Death [Death motive] are subject to her, which she weaves from joy and grief, changing hate to love. The work of Death [Death motive] I daringly took in hand [Death-Potion motive]; Frau Minne wrested it from my grasp. The death-

devoted she took in pledge, doing the work in her own way." In this Power Isolde declares her faith, and her resolve to obey its behests [1] :—

FAITH IN FRAU MINNE.



Vls., Fl., Ob., Eng.H.

At her door flares a Torch—used by Wagner as the symbol of Day—the extinguishing of which is to be the signal for Tristan's approach. Regardless of Brangäne's entreaties, Isolde, with the words, "Frau Minne wills that it be Night," moves quickly towards the Torch, while the Nirvâna motive is loudly sounded in the orchestra. Seizing it with an imposing gesture, and telling Brangäne to go to her watch-tower, she casts it to earth, saying: "The Light, though it were my life's own flame, laughing I quench without fear." [2]

[1] We are here reminded of the *Minne-Dienst* of the old Minnesingers, which was a vow of service to Frau Minne.

[2] As Wagner treated this drama as "a Supplementary Act" of the *Nibelungen*, it may be pointed out that he uses this word "laughter" in the same special sense at the end of *Siegfried*, where Brünnhilde's and Siegfried's closing words are: "Lighting Love and Laughing Death."

As she casts the Torch to the ground the Death motive blares out on the trumpets with magnificent effect, combined with the Torch motive.[1]

The significance of the Death motive, so strongly accentuated here, is made clearer by the fact that Wagner once said to a friend when playing *Tristan* to him: "The ancients represented Eros as the genius of death, with a reversed torch in his hand." As we have explained in dealing with the *Lohengrin* drama:—"Eros, who corresponds to the mysterious Grail Knight"—and here of course to Frau Minne—"was the highest aspect of Love, so divine and impersonal as but faintly to be comprehended by finite minds."[2]

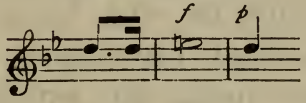
The motive of Isolde's Expectancy is heard as she looks anxiously towards an avenue of trees: then, as her impatience increases, and she begins to wave her veil,

[1] Despite its importance at this point, the Death motive is omitted from Kleinmichel's pianoforte score, though it is included in Von Bülow's.

[2] See "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail," Note, p. 43.

the motive of Summons appears, growing more and more urgent.[1]

THE SUMMONS.



Fl., Ob., Cl., Hor.

Tristan quickly answers the signal, and in almost the first words of greeting we find the assurance—if indeed it be needed—that this is their first meeting since they were parted on the ship. "At last! At last!—Is it I? Is it thou? Is it no trick? Is it no dream?" But their language soon begins to assume a character which justifies us in regarding this drama as a Mystery-Play, in the highest sense of the term. As Kufferath truly says: "It is quite extraordinary that this true and logical development of love, to the point where it becomes etherealised and elevated above material life, has not been recognised—that even

[1] The waving of the veil in time to the Summons motive is highly effective. It was first introduced by Rosa Sucher, who was trained in the part by Wagner himself.

only a few critics have hardly, and that with difficulty, caught a glimpse of it. . . . But—and it is from this, I think, that all the mistakes arise—this scene is written, from beginning to end, in a most subtle and metaphorical language. Everything in it is symbolical, the images melt one into the other and can be used indifferently. The words, detached from their literal sense, become universal and infinite in their significance; and the dialogue which, primarily, was built entirely upon the emotions evoked by the situation, assumes an abstract and metaphysical aspect. . . . There is another literary element which has entered very deeply into the poem of Tristan, and is more particularly felt in the love scene: it is the language of the subtle symbols and imagery of Persian poetry, notably of the poet Hafiz" (see *ante*, p. 5, and *post*, p. 123).

It would be necessary to quote almost the whole of this mystical dialogue to do it anything like complete justice. For, like all great poetry of this nature, it is extraordinarily concentrated and every word is of importance. We can only recommend a most careful study of the original, as the

space at our command will not permit of our doing more than indicating the lines on which that study should be conducted.

As we have already pointed out, the main feature of the symbolical language in this Act is the contrast between Day as the world of Illusion, and Night as the realm of Truth, or Knowledge. This symbolism is comparatively unfamiliar in the Occident; but, strangely enough, since Wagner's death, scholars have discovered that the idea is an ancient Celtic one; thus affording a striking confirmation of the accuracy of his intuition in dealing with a story associated so closely with Celtic lands.

Isolde tells Tristan that in extinguishing the torch she "bade the Day defiance," and while the Day motive (see *ante*, p. 71) begins to sound in the orchestra he replies: "The Day! the Day! the spiteful Day, I hate and curse our bitterest foe! as thou the Torch, would I could quench the insolent glare of the Day." "Was it not the Day that lied in him?" she asks, when he came to Erin to woo her for Marke, "to doom the true one to death?"

"'Twas the Day that wrested her from me," answers Tristan: "In the shining glare of Day, how were Isolde mine?" "Was she not thine who chose thee?" she rejoins. "What lie told the impious Day that thou should'st betray the belovèd foreordained for thee?"

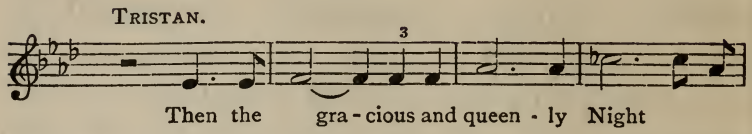
Thus together they review the mistakes of the past; and Tristan goes on to show Isolde the reason for his treacherous conduct towards her: The dazzling light of the sun of worldly fame had pierced the inner depths of his heart, and lit up, with its deceitful beams, the secret image of Isolde which he himself had never dared to look upon. Then a madness seized upon his brain and he loudly extolled to all what appeared to him so glorious and fit for fame.

In following Isolde's explanations to Tristan we must not lose sight of the fact, indicated by her in the First Act, that her function here is that of the Heart (Intuition) revealing to the Head (Intellect) the reasons for the mistakes which it has made, and leading it onward to the perception of higher truths. Tristan in his deluded state appeared to her as a foe, whom she

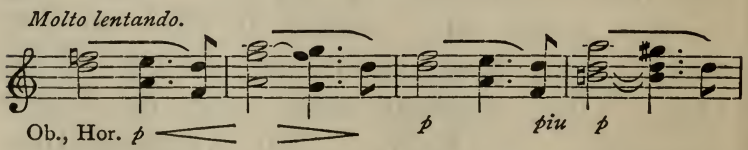
actually hated; and in this we have an example of that element of "sex antagonism" almost universally recognised as something which must ever exist as the necessary opposite to sex attraction. The escape from its sway is shown in this Act when Tristan and Isolde lose "the sense of separateness"—or duality—in the higher state of sexless unity (see *post*, p. 88).

Thus we see the reason for Isolde's words: "From that which revealed thee as traitor, from light of Day I longed to flee, and take thee too into the Night, where my soul foresaw the end of this lie; where deceit's dread delusion should melt away. There to drink eternal love, devoted to union with thee in death." The Death motive accompanies Isolde's concluding words and is succeeded by her Magic motive, as Tristan speaks of the blessed promise of atonement which came to him in the guise of "sweet death" at her hands; and how, with the sinking of his Day, "the gracious and queenly Night dawned" in his heart. The Night motive, to which Wagner makes an interesting reference in the Wesendonk correspond-

ence (see *post*, p. 84), is first heard at this point :—

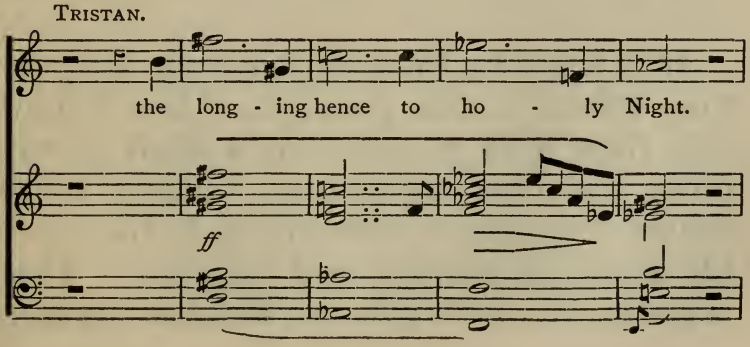


Tristan lauds the Love-Potion which, as Isolde reminds him, brought the Day back again to him "who lay so nigh to death." Its enchantment, flowing to him through the gates of death, revealed—he declares—that wondrous realm of Night which had hitherto been to him but a dream. The motive of Isolde's faith in Frau Minne appears, and is blended with the Day motive, as she tells him how the Day revenged itself by forcing him to yield up that which had thus been revealed to him. Yet another motive, in a sudden change from quick to slow time, expresses her tragic fate "living there alone in the glare of barren pomp" :—

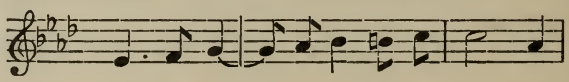


The first climax of this scene is led up to in Tristan's declaration that although

the "spiteful and envious Day" had power to keep them apart, it could no longer deceive them, because they had become dedicated to the Night. The motive of Isolde's Magic is succeeded by that of Death, as Tristan continues, in the following beautiful words: "Who gazes loving on the Night of Death, to whom she confides her mystery deep: the lies of Day, fame and honour, power and gain, so dazzlingly great, are dissolved like worthless dust in the sunbeams. Amid the idle dreams of Day for him remains one longing only, the longing hence to holy Night, where from always, only true, laughs [see *ante*, p. 75] to him the bliss of Love." The new form of the Death motive accompanies the yearning for Night:—



followed by an extension of Isolde's Magic, leading upwards to the wondrous Nirvâna motive, as Tristan sinks on his knees before Isolde, and leans his head upon her arm. Then, with one of the most beautiful effects in the whole drama, the Night motive is heard once more from the lips of Tristan, as he joins his voice with Isolde's in their first great duet—the Invocation to Night: "O sink upon me, Night of Love! Let me forget that still I live, take me into thine embrace, from the world O set me free!" A variant of the Night motive occurs at the words uttered by Isolde: "Deep in our hearts the sun is hid, the stars of joy light laughing up" (see *ante*, pp. 75, 83):—



In a letter to Frau Wesendonk Wagner thus refers to this passage: "But if now and then it is revealed in a flash to my inner life, how everything outside takes refuge there, then everything in the inner life becomes warmer and brighter. That is probably the Night of *Tristan*: 'Deep

in our hearts the sun is hid' . . ." etc. This throws a good deal of light upon what Wagner means in this drama by the idea of Night; and also leaves no doubt as to the identity of the Night motive.

The great duet concludes with an expression of their realisation of oneness with the Soul of the World: "Myself—then, am I the world."[1]

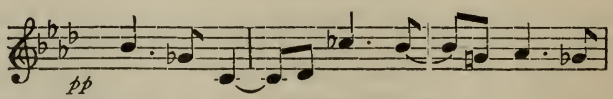
This idea, that the universe and the individual are one in essence, has its origin in Eastern philosophy. It is, for instance, thus expressed in one of the Upanishads (the oldest mystical writings of India)—"This Soul that is the Self of all that is, this is the real, this is the Self; *THAT THOU ART*,"—and is to be found, in one form or another, in most of the writings of mystics in all ages. It has been stated that Wagner got it from Schopenhauer;

[1] *Selbst—dann bin ich die Welt.* It will scarcely be credited by those who have not seen it that in H. and F. Corder's translation this passage is rendered as "Thou'rt my world, thine am I." No wonder the inner meaning of this drama is seldom understood in this country, for this translation is the one published with the vocal score, and sold at Covent Garden when performances are given there. And this, too, is but one of many similar instances occurring in their translation.

the real truth being that they held this and other similar ideas in common. For in quite an early essay ("Art and Revolution," 1849), writing of the Greek when face to face with his inmost soul in the tragedy of *Prometheus*, Wagner describes him as "glorious godlike man, one with the Universal, the Universal summed up in him."

As the lovers sink back on a bank of flowers, wholly absorbed by this vision of "the soul's supreme desire, eternal dreamless sleep," the voice of Brangäne is heard from the watch-tower, warning them that "Night will soon depart." Then we hear a motive which began to make its appearance in the previous duet, and is a variation of the Longing for Death (see *ante*, p. 60). It is here associated with the desire to be united in death.

ETERNAL REST MOTIVE.

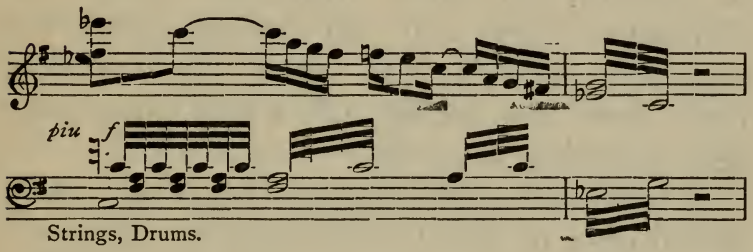


Vls., Violas, Cb.

Then follows the new form of the

Death motive, already referred to, accompanying Tristan's words: "Let me die! —Let Day give way to Death!" For he now realises that Death, which would destroy his body, could not touch his love:—"If I died for Love, could Love too die? The ever-living cease with me?"

At this point a passage curiously similar to the motive of Kundry in *Parsifal* occurs; and we here give it for the purpose of comparison [1]—

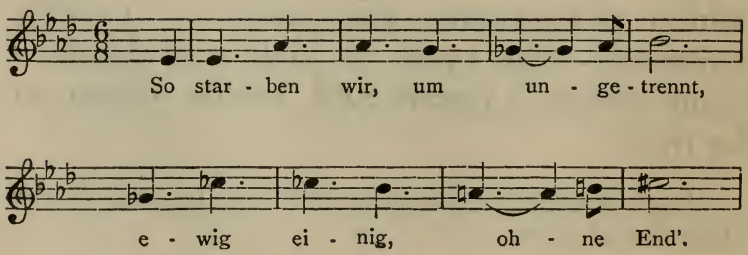


The association of ideas is fairly obvious; for Kundry represents that which perpetuates the curse of earthly existence—the cycle of birth and death—from which Tristan and Isolde yearn to be freed.

[1] See "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail," p. 114.

Finding that Tristan is still firm in his death-resolve, Isolde leads him yet a step further. He has felt his oneness with the World-Soul, and now he must understand the mystery of his own transformation, as something higher than his present self, through this mystical Love-Death. "But our love," she asks, "—is not its name Tristan — and — Isolde? Did Tristan go alone to death that bond would be disturbed." So the second truth flashes on him: Beyond the gate of Death, in that wondrous state of Nirvâna, they can no longer exist as separate beings, but must be resolved into that one being of which they are the opposing aspects.

Thus the second climax is reached with the motive of the Death-song accompanying Tristan's words, in which Isolde presently joins:—

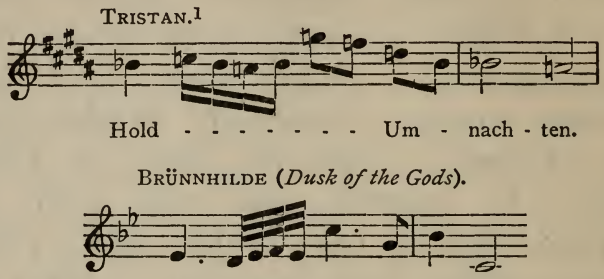


"So should we then together die, ever one for all eternity, without awaking, without repining, nameless[1] in the bonds of love, wholly to each other given, only to live for love." Again comes the hidden warning voice: "Already Night gives way to day"; but all fear of Day's illusion is passed, and we hear the Nirvâna motive, as Isolde with rising ecstasy, gives forth her fiat: "Ever let Night protect us."

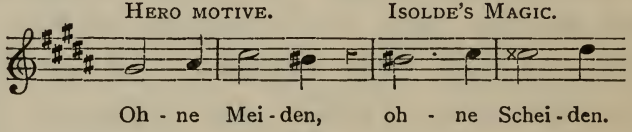
The third and final climax is reached as they blend their voices once more in the wonderful pæan to that mysterious state which they so ardently desire to enter. Their first words: "O longed-for, everlasting Night" are sung to the later form of the Death motive, with the full power of the orchestra. Then, with the questions: "How to grasp it? How to leave it?" the motive of the Death-Song recurs, together with a figure embodying Wagner's favourite "turn" and recalling the later Brünn-

[1] The same idea is thus expressed in the "Mundaka" Upanishad: "As rolling rivers in the ocean reach their setting, laying name and form aside; so he who has reached illumination, rid of name and form, enters the divine Spirit, more Supreme than the supreme."

hilde motive in *Dusk of the Gods.* It is followed by the motives of Tristan as



Hero and Isolde's Magic introduced so skilfully as scarcely to be recognised in the actual hearing—



In turn they say to each other "Thou, Isolde—Tristan, I. No more Tristan, nor Isolde," and then the Nirvâna motive re-enters and is worked up with extraordinary power to the supremest height of exaltation with the words: "Cease-

[1] This is one of the few occasions where Wagner permits himself to write more than one note to a syllable. They are rarely to be found, save in these impassioned climaxes. Similar instances occur in the great duet at the end of *Siegfried.*

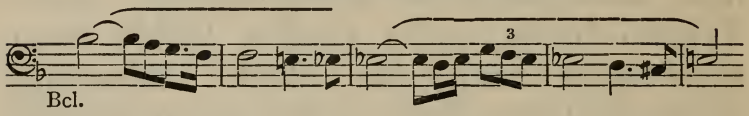
less, whole, and single soul" (see *ante*, p. 88).[1]

Suddenly a shriek is heard from Brangäne, and Kurwenal rushes in with drawn sword, crying "Save thyself, Tristan." The motive of the hunting horns is sounded as Marke, Melot and the rest of the hunting party quickly follow him, and pause in consternation, while Tristan involuntarily shields Isolde from their gaze with his cloak. Morning dawns as the echoes of the great song of Night die away, and give place to the Day motive, while Tristan exclaims: "The barren Day—for the last time!" Then the treacherous Melot triumphantly

[1] The importance of the most careful attention to dramatic detail in the rendering of so symbolic a drama as this is well exemplified in the following appreciation by Emil Heckel, written shortly after the Master's death: "With *Tristan and Isolde* in 1886, Frau Wagner showed the world her extraordinary capacity for independent pursuance of the Master's steps. The great scene in the second act stood out most markedly from anything presented at the usual theatres: it was no longer taken as a 'love-duet,' and every receptive spectator must have had it borne in on him that, in the stricter meaning of the word, this scene involves a dramatic progress—*Tristan's accomplishing of life-denial in the heart of Isolde*."—"Letters of Richard Wagner to Emil Heckel: With a brief history of the Bayreuth Festivals." Translated and Indexed by Wm. Ashton Ellis.

asks if he had not justly pledged his head upon Tristan's guilt, and saved his monarch from dishonour. The good and noble-hearted King, whose deep sorrow is expressed by a descending figure resembling Tristan's Sorrow motive, is overwhelmed with grief at the faithlessness of

KING MARKE'S SORROW MOTIVE.



his beloved friend: "O where shall truth be found, now Tristan is untrue?" And as, in broken voice, he tells how—left widowed and childless—he loved Tristan so that never more he wished to wed, the unhappy Knight sinks his head in greater and greater grief. The King's words about the princess whom Tristan wooed for him are very significant, and prove clearly that Isolde is still to him an object of distant veneration, nor is there a word in his speech of rebuke to her (see *post*, p. 116): "Her, my desire ne'er dared approach; before whom passion awestruck sank; who, so noble, fair and holy, bathed my soul in hallowed calm. . . ."

But what is, perhaps, brought out most strongly is the pathos of his inability to fathom "the undiscovered, dark and dread mysterious cause" of it all. Upright and noble, this royal figure is yet but the expression of the best that the outer world of Day can offer. The inner realm of the soul is closed to him. All this finds a concrete expression in the Marke motive :—

Like the soliloquies of Wotan in the *Ring* drama, and Gurnemanz in *Parsifal*, the King's long speech at this point is of a choric or reflective character, a fact which should not be overlooked by those who—not hearing or not understanding his words—find it tedious and out of place. Wagner was far too skilful and sincere a dramatist to make any such mistake, especially in a work designedly condensed. The very fact that his speech produces the effect of a prolonged douche of cold water after the tense excitement and exaltation of the previous scene should give the critical mind pause for thought. It is the

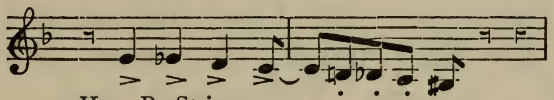
necessary antithesis—the "chill phantom of Day," as Tristan calls it.

Now for the first time does Tristan realise how great a wrong he did to his uncle in wooing Isolde for him. He realises, too, the gulf between them, made infinitely wider by all he has learnt from Isolde; and we, for our part, understand that his reply is the only possible one: "O King in truth I cannot tell thee—and what thou ask'st, that can'st thou ne'er discover"; but the music tells us, with the phrase combined of Tristan's Sorrow and Isolde's Magic, sounded three times, exactly as in the beginning of the Prelude to the drama (see *ante*, p. 35).

Then comes the group of motives associated with Death and Night in the previous scene, while Tristan asks Isolde whether she will follow him to "the dark abode of Night," that "wondrous realm" from which he "once awoke" when his mother, dying, gave him to the light. "When Tristan falsely wooed, Isolde followed him then," she answers. "Thou goest now to thine own, to show me thy heritage. Why should I shun the land that encircles all the world?" (see *post*, p. 102). One oboe

sounds with intense pathos the Nirvâna motive as Tristan bends down and kisses her softly on the brow. Melot, drawing his sword, starts forward in fury, while the following motive is heard :—

BETRAYAL MOTIVE.



Hor., B., Strings.

Reproaching Melot for his treacherous friendship, Tristan declares that it was he who fostered his ambition and led the band that urged him to seek new fame and honour by bringing Isolde as bride to his King. Her Magic motive is heard as he continues : "Thy look, Isolde, blinded him too, from jealousy my friend betrays me to the King whom I betrayed." Attacking Melot furiously, he lets fall his own guard, and sinks wounded into the arms of Kurwenal ; and as the curtain falls a variant of the Marke motive is played fortissimo by the orchestra, while the King holds back Melot from completing his deadly work.

A word of explanation is necessary con-

cerning Tristan's action at the close of this scene. Believing, from Isolde's reply, that she will follow him through the gates of Death, he has deliberately sought the only possible way of release from his misery and dishonour. At the beginning of the Act Isolde, as we have seen, had told Brangäne that Frau Minne had taken into her own hands the work of Death which, in the First Act, she herself attempted to execute (see *ante*, p. 64). Tristan has now made a similar attempt, only to receive a more grievous wound than that inflicted by Morold; and in the last Act it will be seen how Isolde has still to sojourn in the world of Day, while Tristan passes through a period of suffering and atonement.

2. THE DRAMA

ACT III

"In the Kingdom of Harmony, therefore, is no beginning and no end; just as the objectless and self-devouring fervour of the soul, all ignorant of its source, is nothing but itself; nothing save longing, yearning, tossing, pining—and *dying out*; that is, dying without having found its satisfaction in an 'object'; thus dying without dying[1] and therefore ever returning back upon itself."—*Prose Works*, vol. i., "The Art-Work of the Future."

[1] Cf. Act III. Tristan's *Sehnen! Sehnen—im Sterben mich zu sehnen, vor Sehnsucht nicht zu sterben!* [this is rendered by Mr. Jameson as: "Yearning, yearning, dying to yearn, to yearn and *not* to die!" See *post*, p. 107].

2. THE DRAMA

ACT III

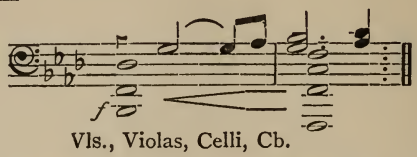
"*All that is by Nature twain*
Fears, or suffers by, the pain
Of Separation: Love is only
Perfect when itself transcends
Itself, and, one with that it loves,
In undivided Being blends."
"Salámán and Absál."—JÁMÍ.

THE scene of this Act is laid in the garden of Tristan's ancestral castle in Karéol (Brittany),[1] whither the faithful Kurwenal has brought his wounded master, beyond the reach of his enemy. Tristan is seen lying, unconscious, on a couch beneath a large tree, near the ramparts, with the grief-stricken Kurwenal watching anxiously by his side.

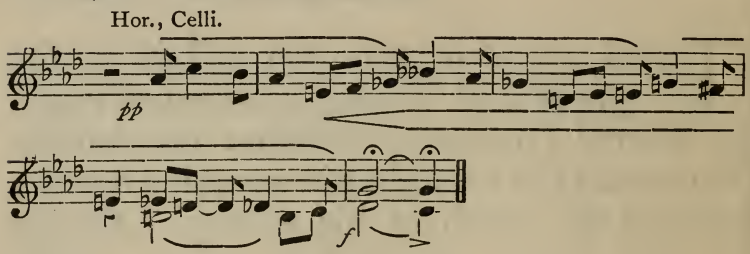
In the opening theme of the prelude

[1] There is an island at the mouth of the tidal creek on which Douarnenez, in Brittany, is situated, which is known to this day as the *Île de Tristan.*

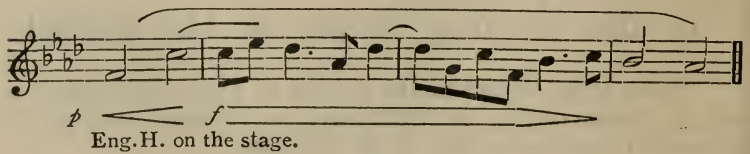
we recognise a variant of Isolde's Magic motive :—



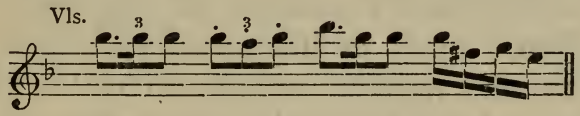
It impresses us at once with the heavy weight of woe and quenchless yearning which tortures and oppresses Tristan's spirit. After a mournful progression of thirds expressing a long and fruitless watching over the trackless ocean, there is another variant, this time of the Love-Potion motive in the prelude to the First Act (see *ante*, p. 37) :—



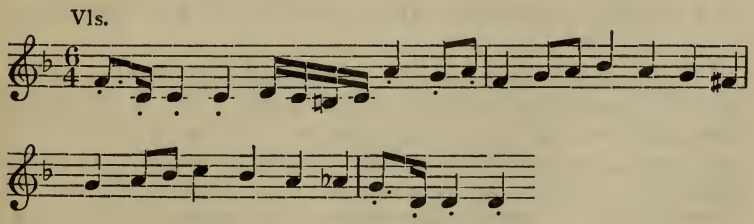
The melancholy tune of an unseen herdsman playing on his pipe is heard as the curtain rises :—



The whole impression is one of the most intense melancholy and pathos. Kurwenal, in utter despair at Tristan's condition, has at length sent to Cornwall for Isolde, as the only one who has the power to heal his wound. The ship is expected hourly, and the herdsman is watching for it from the battlements, but as yet in vain. Presently the plaintive strains of his pipe awaken Tristan, and he asks in a hollow voice where he is. The joy of Kurwenal at his master's awaking from his long trance is expressed by the following theme—



Then comes the Karéol motive, as he tells Tristan how he had carried him down to



the ship and brought him home to his own land and people, there to find succour from

death and wounds.[1] "Think'st thou so?" asks Tristan, "I know it otherwise. But what I know I cannot tell thee. Where I awoke I tarried not; but where it was I cannot tell thee. I did not see the sun,[2] nor saw I land nor people. But what I saw I cannot tell thee. I was—where I have ever been, where I for aye shall go—in the vast realm of the Night of all the worlds."

Here we find expressed the idea upon which, in part, the principle of Re-birth rests: That the soul has existed for ever in the past and will endure eternally in the future; for, as Wagner says: "the Future is not thinkable, except as stipulated by the Past;" and in his wonderful essay on Beethoven, written about 1870, occurs a passage which has a direct bearing on this significant refrain of Tristan's ("But what I saw I cannot tell thee"). He says that it is only possible for the Will to become

[1] Referring to this hopeful speech of Kurwenal's, Wagner says in a letter to Frau Wesendonk: "It is the more intensely moving in that it makes no impression whatever on Tristan, but passes him like an empty sound. It is an immense tragedy—overpowering in the highest degree."

[2] Describing this same mysterious realm—"the land that encircles all the world" (see *ante*, p. 94)—the "Katha" Upanishad says: "The sun shines not there, nor moon nor stars."

"pure knowledge" in so far "as it stays motionless in its deepest inner chamber: and here, *beyond the bounds of time and space*,[1] it knows itself the world's both One and All (see *ante*, p. 85). *What it here has seen, no tongue can impart*[1] as the dream of deepest sleep can only be conveyed to the waking consciousness through translation into the language of a second, an allegoric dream which immediately precedes our wakening, so for the direct vision of itself the Will creates a second organ of transmission,—an organ whose one side faces toward that inner vision, whilst the other thrusts into the reappearing outer world with the sole direct and sympathetic message, that of Tone" (*Prose Works*, vol. v., "Beethoven").

This temporary absence of Tristan from his body bears a close resemblance to the "descent into the Underworld" which the records—sacred and otherwise—of all ages tell us a would-be initiate into the ancient Mysteries had to undergo.[2] And when we remember that the Tristan legend in one

[1] The italics are ours (see also "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail," p. 125, *et seq.*).

[2] Freemasonry still preserves the *form* of the rite in one of its degrees.

of its forms is a solar myth, Tristan representing the Sun, the connection becomes more obvious; for Wagner has throughout preserved the symbolic contrast between the Day as the world of Appearances and the Night as the realm of Realities (or the Mysteries).[1] In this journey to the Underworld Tristan has found that the "desire of Life" is not yet stilled. Isolde is "still in the realm of the Sun!" and whilst this is so it is a sign that he cannot free himself from the bonds of the flesh. We hear the Death motive as he cries: "I heard Death's gate close crashing behind me; now wide it stands, by the Sun's rays burst open. Once more I am forced to flee from the Night, to seek for her still, to see her, to find her—in whom alone Tristan must lose himself ever." He curses the Day which is the source of all his woe, and we hear the motive of the Torch, followed by that of Isolde's Magic,

[1] "Astronomically," says a well-known writer, "*this* '*descent into hell*' symbolised the Sun during the autumnal equinox, when, abandoning the higher sidereal regions . . . the Sun was imagined to undergo a *temporary death* and to descend into the infernal regions . . . mystically, it typified the initiatory rites in the crypts of the temple called the Underworld . . . all such final initiations took place *during the night*."

as in the Prelude to Act II. (see *ante*, p. 72), while he calls with failing voice on Isolde to "quench the Light," and allow the Night to come.

Exhausted with the effort, he sinks back, while the ethereal strains of the Nirvâna motive sound softly in the orchestra. Then, very faintly, he whispers: "The Light is still unquenched, not yet is it Night in the house: Isolde lives and wakes; she called me from the Night." At these words Kurwenal confesses that he has sent to Cornwall for Isolde, and bids him be of good cheer: "Thy foolish man bethought himself that she who once closed Morold's wound, could heal with ease the hurt received from Melot's sword." Transported at the news, Tristan urges Kurwenal to go and watch for the ship, which he declares he can already see approaching the shore.[1] "She nears! she nears, with fearless haste! It waves, it waves, the flag on the mast!"

Writing to Liszt, in 1854, with reference to his first conception of this drama,

[1] Cf. *Lohengrin*, Act III., where Elsa has a clairvoyant vision of the swan, coming to fetch her champion, just before she asks the forbidden question (see "Parsifal, Lohengrin, and The Legend of the Holy Grail," pp. 83, 84).

Wagner says: ". . . with the 'black flag' which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die." Nearly two years later he tells him that in order to understand his new Buddhist drama, *Die Sieger* ("The Victors")—which later was merged in *Parsifal* (see *ante*, p. 11)—he must first assimilate Tristan, "especially the third Act, with the black flag and the white." According to the legend it had been arranged that a white flag should be flown if Isolde were on board, and a black one if the mission had been unsuccessful. Evidently Wagner at first intended to make a special feature of this signal.

Kurwenal reports from the battlements that "no ship is yet in sight"; and as the mournful strain of the herdsman is resumed Tristan sinks yet deeper into a gloomy meditation which impresses us with the most profound sadness. It rouses in him the memory of his birth in words which recall the sorrow-laden lot of Siegfried's parents: "When he who begot me died, when dying she gave me birth, to them too the old old tune, with the same sad fear and longing, must have sounded its lament: That strain that asked

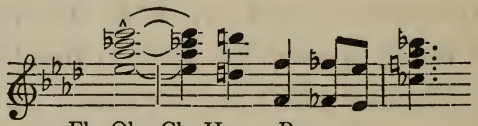
me once, that seems to ask me still, what fate was cast for me when I was born; what fate? The old sad tune tells me again—to yearn! to die! to die! to yearn! No, ah no! Worse fate is mine; yearning, yearning, dying to yearn, to yearn and *not* to die!" (see *ante*, p. 98).

These latter lines have, perhaps more than any other part of the drama, been ascribed to Schopenhauer's influence; but we have already shown (see *ante*, pp. 7, 85)[1] that Wagner had grasped intuitively the great German philosopher's main principles long before he became acquainted with his writings. It is by no means the least valuable part of the rich heritage left by Wagner to the world that he has laid bare so much of his inner life, and thus enabled us to see that the essential principles of his dramas are distilled from his own inner experience.

In the course of Tristan's reverie we come to the point where we learn the psychological significance of the Love-draught which he shared with Isolde and which is still torturing him with the curse of "desire that dies not": "Alas! it is

[1] See also the two previous volumes of this series.

I myself that made it.[1] From father's need, from mother's woe, from lover's longing ever and aye; from laughing and weeping, from grief and joy, I distilled the potion's deadly poisons." The concentrated power of this terrible Desire-curse here finds expression in the following theme, many times repeated:—



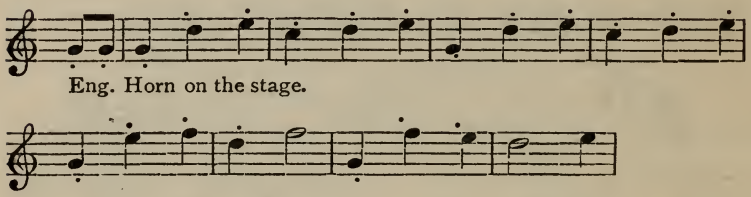
Fl., Ob., Cl., Horns, B.

Again Tristan falls back in a state of such exhaustion that the unhappy Kurwenal fears that he is dead. But his inner senses are on the alert for the arrival of the ship. We hear Isolde's Magic motive, followed by the beautiful theme of Eternal Rest, as in a faint voice he describes to Kurwenal his vision of her

[1] It has already been made clear that Wagner was particularly occupied with the Buddhistic philosophy while he was at work on this drama; and in this special passage he expresses very clearly the teaching that our present experiences are the result of previous actions in this or former existences on earth (see Vol. I. of this series, on the *Ring* drama, pp. 137, 138, also Vol. II., Preface). In his description of Schnorr's wonderful rendering of the part (see Appendix, p. 144) he describes this point in the action as "the apex of the pyramid to which the tragic tendence of this *Tristan* towers up."

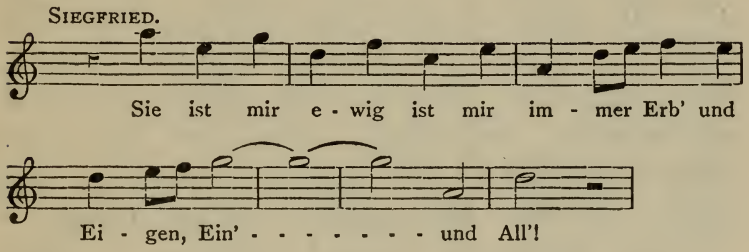
coming over the sea. The latter theme changes into its earlier form of Longing for Death and is combined with a new motive most poignantly expressing Tristan's craving for the healing balm of Isolde's presence. This is best seen where he sings its tones in the sad cry: "Ah, Isolde! Isolde!" while in the accompaniment we hear the Death-Longing combined with his Sorrow motive.

Then in the bass appears the Night motive in an extended form, foreshadowing the approach of his release from life. With rising excitement he bids Kurwenal away to the battlements, and at the same moment the joyful piping of the herdsman announces that Tristan has indeed seen the approach of Isolde :—



In reference to this motive Wagner writes to Frau Wesendonk: "When I was composing the joyful melody of the shepherd at the coming of Isolde, I lit all at once on a melodious phrase still more joyous, in fact almost heroically so, and at the same time wholly popular in its character. I was near to throwing down everything when I saw that this melody did not belong to Tristan's shepherd but to the very Siegfried. Forthwith I looked up the closing verses of the scene between Siegfried

and Brünnhilde, and recognised that my melody was exactly suited to the words: 'She is for ever, is for aye my wealth and world, my one and all!' [We give the melody from *Siegfried* for comparison]—



This will have an extremely jubilant effect. Thus I was at once immersed in *Siegfried*; and shall I then not believe that I shall live and endure?" We have already mentioned that Wagner had laid aside the scoring of his *Siegfried* poem in the middle of the Second Act in order to write *Tristan*.

"The flag? the flag?" cries Tristan in wild excitement. "The flag of bliss at the masthead joyous and bright" (see *ante*, p. 106), answers Kurwenal from the battlements. Then, as Tristan anxiously inquires whether the steersman can be trusted to guide her safely into port and

is not a treacherous ally of Melot, who may perchance betray him, the Betrayal motive, last heard at the end of the Second Act, reappears. His excitement rises to fever heat when Kurwenal reluctantly goes to assist at the landing, and the play of motives in the orchestra becomes more and more eloquent (Night, Longing for Death, and Eternal Rest interwoven together), until at last he raises himself to his knees, crying in the tones of the Wounded-Tristan motive: "With bleeding wound Morold I once did slay!"—Then, to the motive of Isolde the Healer: "With bleeding wound Isolde win I to to-day!"[1]

Tearing the bandage from his wound, he springs up from his couch and staggers forward to meet Isolde, whose voice is heard without, calling, "Tristan, belovèd." At this moment the Torch motive is sounded, alone, with the full power of the orchestra, as Tristan in a frenzy of excitement, answers: "What! do I hear

[1] In these two sentences Wagner has revealed his knowledge of the earliest Solar form of the myth—Tristan as the Sun rising and setting in a crimson glow (the bleeding wound). See also *ante*, p. 104.

the Light? The Torchlight, ha! The Torch is quenched!"

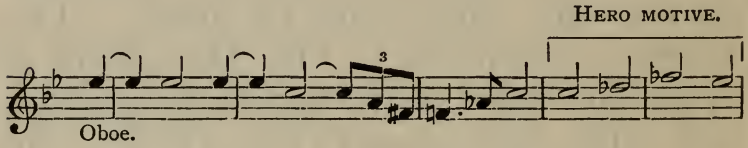
There can be but one explanation for this expression of Tristan's, "do I *hear* the Light?" in view of the symbolism of Day and Night which we have seen to be dominant throughout the drama. Isolde's voice calling to him—the last thing he hears in the realm of deceptive Day which he is about to exchange for the Night of reality—he identifies with *Light*; because, as he said to Kurwenal, Isolde is still in its realm, whence her presence has called him back from the gates of Death. He knows that, so soon as they are once more together, they will go into the Night, and he adds: "The Torch is quenched." The Day-gleam is dying out with Isolde's approaching steps, and with her comes the Night, the "Night" of Nirvâna.

Tristan sinks fainting into the arms of Isolde, as she rushes towards him; while the Torch motive merges into the Death motive.[1] We hear the familiar blend of

[1] It will be remembered that this conjunction of motives occurred when Isolde extinguished the Torch, at the beginning of the Second Act (see *ante*, p. 76).

the motives of Isolde's Magic and Tristan's Sorrow as she once more utters his name; and then, for the last time, the Look motive is sounded (by the celli) with indescribable pathos, while the dying Tristan—his eyes fixed upon Isolde's—breathes out her name with his life.

Night has at last come for Tristan; but once more it is the old impatience, unable to endure to the end, that has hastened its advent. We hear the sad questioning motive of Isolde's Lament, ending with Tristan's Hero motive in the minor, as she cries: "Isolde comes, with Tristan true to die!"



Then follow the exquisite strains of the great Death-Song of the Second Act (see *ante*, p. 88) with the figure of ecstasy and a fragment of the Nirvâna motive, as she beseeches him, in vain, not to die of the wound, but to let her heal it so that to *both united* life's light may

be quenched, and blissful and strong they may share together the realm of Night. Here the Death-Potion motive is sounded twice, in the bass, and is then heard no more.

As Isolde sinks senseless upon Tristan's body, the herdsman, and the steersman of the ship that brought her, announce to Kurwenal the arrival of a second vessel bearing Marke, Melot, Brangäne and others. Believing them to be unfriendly, Kurwenal—mad with grief at Tristan's death, and burning to avenge it—barricades the great gates, and strikes down Melot as he breaks through with armed men. Then, driven back, wounded, by King Marke and his retinue, he staggers to Tristan's body and falls dead beside it, with a touching expression of fidelity: "Tristan, dear master, blame me not if I faithfully follow thee now."

Gazing mournfully on the solemn scene, the King utters these words of sad reproach: "Dead, then, all! All—dead! My hero, my Tristan, most loved of friends, to-day, too, must thou betray thy friend? To-day when he comes to prove his truth?" For, as Brangäne

now relates, the King had sought from her the meaning of the riddle, and, learning of the Love-draught, had hastened to repair the wrong which had been wrought through Tristan's own delusion. To Isolde, now awakening from her swoon, he speaks of his noble purpose; but she seems absorbed in a clairvoyant vision and unconscious of what is passing around her. With rapt and uplifted gaze she begins softly to whisper in the melting strains of the Death-Song the revelation of her approaching union with Tristan in the "nameless" state which together they had glimpsed in the Second Act—

Mild und leise	A smile his lips
wie er lächelt,	has softly lighted;
wie das Auge	his eyes are sweetly
hold er öffnet:	on me opened;
seht ihr, Freunde,	friends, you see not?
säh't ihr's nicht?	Say you so?

Until now there had been a fear oppressing the heart that Tristan, in his impetuous ardour, had—like Elsa in *Lohengrin*—deferred the blissful consummation; but, as her wondrous song proceeds that fear is dispelled by the certitude that in this

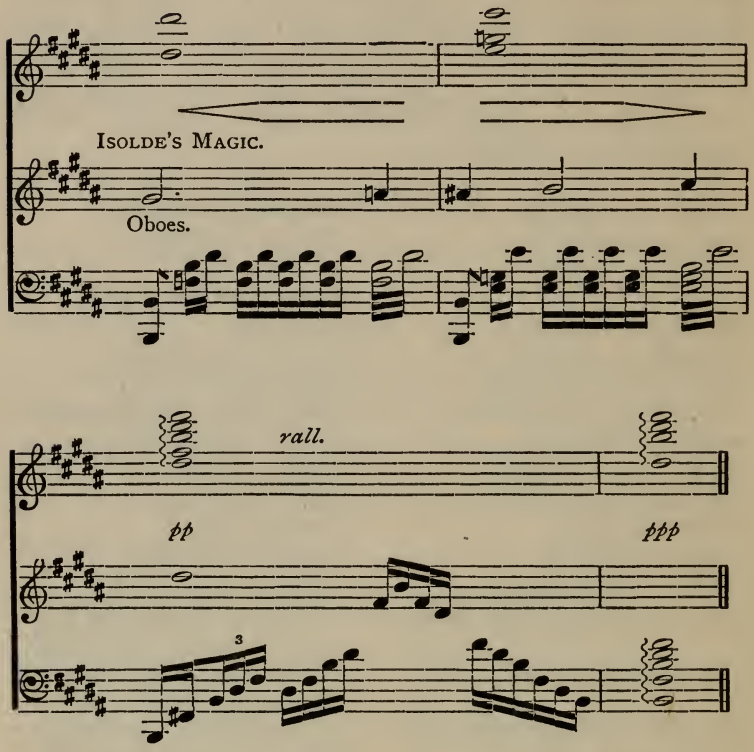
transfigured woman is embodied that redeeming power which shall bring peace and rest in the bosom of the Oversoul. Rising ever in power and grandeur, the Nirvâna motive bursts forth at last like a shout of victory with the magnificent concluding words :—

Heller schallend	Clearer growing,
mich umwallend,	deeper flowing,
sind es Wellen	is it waves
sanfter Lüfte ?	of breezes blended ?
Sind es Wogen	Is it seas
wonniger Düfte ?	of scent unended ?
Wie sie schwellen,	How they stream
mich umrauschen,	and storm and darken ?
soll ich athmen,	Shall I breathe them ?
soll ich lauschen ?	Shall I hearken ?
Soll ich schlürfen,	Shall I drink,
untertauchen.	or dive below,
süss in Düften	spend my breath
mich verhauchen ?	beneath their flow ?—
In dem wogendem Schwall	Where the ocean of bliss
	is unbounded and whole,
in dem tönenden Schall	where in sound upon sound
	the scent-billows roll,
in des Welt-Athems	in the World's yet one
wehendem All—	all-swallowing Soul—
ertrinken—	to drown—
versinken—	go down—
unbewusst—	to nameless Night—
höchste Lust !	last delight ! [1]

Then, as the great theme gradually dies away in ethereal harp sounds,

[1] English version by Alfred Forman.

and the last breath of her erstwhile unfinished Magic motive is finally resolved,



Isolde sinks lifeless on Tristan's body and the Tragedy of the Soul is once more accomplished. But this is no "ending of untold sadness"; rather is it one in which we see the Soul, purified and freed from the shackles of the body, rise

triumphantly on the wings of Love and Knowledge into that realm of deathless consciousness clearly indicated by Wagner as the only possible goal of man's life-struggles.

SOME EASTERN VERSIONS OF THE LEGEND

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WE have already pointed out that Wagner's version of the *Tristan* legend is more akin to Eastern Philosophy and imagery than to Western; and now that his drama has been passed in review, certain points of similarity to many such legends in Eastern literature will be found to be the more striking. The space at our disposal only permits of our giving a brief summary of a few of the more important.

To turn first of all to Persia. We find much in the writings of the Súfís,[1] of whom the poet Hafiz was extolled by Wagner as "the greatest, the most sublime phil-

[1] A mystical sect in Persia, who claim the possession of the esoteric philosophy and doctrine of *true* Mohammedanism.

osopher" (see *ante*, p. 78); Goethe also was familiar with his poems, and wrote an epigraph thereon which is equally applicable to Wagner's *Tristan* poem; and which Mr. Charles Dowdeswell renders as follows:—

> "Let us call the Word the bride,
> And the bridegroom, Mind;
> Who with Hafiz would abide,
> Must this wedding find."

But the poet Jámí (also a Súfí mystic, 1414–1492), in his "Salámán and Absál," throws perhaps the most illuminating light upon Wagner's method of using the story of a great love to show how the human soul can be raised, through that experience, to a perception and realisation of the highest truths. Edward Fitzgerald, in the preface to his English version of Jámí's poem,[1] describes it as "one of many Allegories under which the Persian mystic symbolised an esoteric doctrine which he dared not—and probably could not—more intelligibly reveal." He does, however, reveal much, for he adopts the unusual expedient of

[1] "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám; and the Salámán and Absál of Jámí; rendered into English verse." London, 1879.

embodying an interpretation in the poem itself. In the "Preliminary Invocation" a keynote is struck which might serve equally for *Tristan* :—

> "Oh Thou, whose Spirit through this universe
> In which Thou dost involve thyself diffused,
> Shall so perchance irradiate human clay
> That men, suddenly dazzled, lose themselves
> In ecstasy before a mortal shrine
> Whose Light is but a Shade of the Divine;
> . . . . . .
> To thy Harím DIVIDUALITY
> No entrance finds—no word of THIS or THAT;"
> . . . . . .

In the Appendix to the poem Fitzgerald quotes another well-known Súfí parable in elucidation of the last two lines :—This Súfí identification with Deity (further illustrated in the Story of Salámán's first flight), is shadowed in a Parable of Jelaluddin, of which here is an outline : "One knocked at the Beloved's Door; and a Voice asked from within, 'Who is there?' and he answered, 'It is I.' Then the Voice said, 'This House will not hold Me and Thee.' And the Door was not opened. Then went the Lover into the Desert, and fasted and prayed in Solitude. And after a Year he returned, and knocked again at the Door. And again the Voice

asked, 'Who is there?' and he said, 'It is Thyself'—and the Door was opened to him."

Salámán is described in Jámí's poem as representing "the Soul of Man"; Absál is "the Sense-adoring Body"; while a second feminine figure, Zuhrah, is "that Divine Original, of which the Soul of Man darkly possesst, by that fierce Discipline at last he disengages from the Dust." Salámán is at first absorbed by a passion for Absál, but a mysterious directing Intelligence, "the SAGE," gradually weans him from that passion by bringing before his gaze the image of Zuhrah, until at last it supplants that of Absál, and the mortal love is blotted out by the celestial.

In this respect we have, of course, a much closer resemblance to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, where Venus and Elisabeth correspond to Absál and Zuhrah; whereas in the *Tristan* drama Isolde acts almost entirely the part of the latter. Jámí takes particular care to prove, beyond possibility of doubt, that his poem is wholly symbolic and mystic by placing an Afterword, which he terms the "Meaning of the Story," at

the end of the poem itself. The first few lines run as follows :—

> " Under the leaf of many a Fable lies
> The Truth for those who look for it ; of this
> If thou wouldst look behind and find the Fruit,
> (To which the Wiser hand hath found his way)
> Have thy desire—No tale of ME and THEE,—
> Though I and THOU be its Interpreters."

And a footnote to the last line explains that "The Story is of *Generals*, though enacted by *Particulars*." It would, we think, hardly be possible to find a more perfect indication of the inner meaning of Wagner's poem than is contained in these six lines of Jámí's interpretation of his own. Wagner scattered his hints and interpretations through his Prose Works and private letters, and our main object in this series of handbooks is to disinter, collate, and apply them.

It is in the Persian tale of "Valeh and Hadijeh," [1] however, that we find an almost exact parallel to the main idea of the *Tristan* poem. The Mirza tells the English Scribe that the book was written "by a poet called Fakrir, who lived in India two

[1] "The Story of Valeh and Hadijeh." Translated from the Persian by Mirza Mahomed and C. Spring Rice. London, 1903.

centuries ago. It is the history of the love of a friend of his who called himself Valeh." The chief feature of the story is the prominence given to the blending of the two natures — or principles — into one, when they enter the inner life (see *ante*, p. 88). Thus in the chapter, "Hadijeh's Letter," occur the following passages: "Let me begin in the name of that King whose throne is the heart of man. . . . He is the secret counsellor of the heart; He has His home in every eye . . . beauty is the reflection of His face, love is a sign from His glory. His *One* can never be *Two*; *there* is neither parting nor meeting."

Further on, in the chapter, "How Valeh saw Hadijeh in a Vision," the story runs: "And when he awoke, behold he was alone . . . he himself Valeh and Hadijeh. In sleep the one was two; when he awoke it was one; truth came and fancy vanished. For the heart of that poor wanderer became as a pattern and example of death; for has not Ali, our Lord, said the words: 'Oh you who have understanding, behold the living, they are as men that sleep; their waking will be in death, for death is the root and life, the branch and the leaf.' . . . I

am the nightingale and the rose and the garden; I am myself the ringdove and the cypress; one life have I, one heart; no more two, but one; I myself am Hadijeh, I myself am Valeh, I myself am myself." To this the English Scribe adds the note: "He met Hadijeh in his sleep, thus attaining to the stage of 'knowledge' or inspiration. When he awoke the perfect union (*vasal*) succeeded the imperfect. The two were no more two, but one."

A no less striking enunciation of the same idea is to be found in a somewhat unexpected quarter. In an editorial comment on the "New Sayings of Jesus and Fragment of a Lost Gospel from Oxyrhynchus"[1] (pp. 41, 42) we find the following: "'When Salome asked when those things about which she questioned should be made known, the Lord said, When ye trample upon the garment of shame; when the two become one, and the male with the female neither male nor female.'" This passage is quoted from "the Gospel according to the Egyptians which is referred to several times by

[1] Published for the Egypt Exploration Fund, by Henry Frowde. London, 1904.

Clement of Alexandria." The Editors compare it with a somewhat similar passage to be found in "the Second Epistle of Clement XII. 2 (an early Christian homily employing other Gospel materials besides the Canonical Gospels): 'For the Lord himself being asked by someone when his Kingdom should come, said, When the two shall become one, and the outside as the inside,[1] and the male with the female neither male nor female.'"

The following beautiful little story is still told in Afghanistan: Durkhânî has been forced to wed a stranger chief instead of the one she loves, Adam Khân. Her only comfort is in the solitude of her garden, where she has planted two lovely flowers side by side; one represents Adam, the other Durkhânî. But one day she sees that Adam's flower has suddenly faded, and at that moment her husband appears before her, a sword stained with

[1] There is an ancient doctrine or tradition in the East that Man was originally androgyne and became dual by the throwing outward of his female principle. This is symbolised in Genesis, where Adam becomes man and woman through Eve being made out of one of his ribs. The perfect state will be reached by the reunion of the two separated principles.

blood in his hand, and tells her that it is the blood of her lover:—She falls dead beside the withered flower. Adam is not dead, but only wounded; on hearing of her death he says but one word: '*Durkhânî*!' and dies. They are laid in the earth far apart from each other; but *love was stronger than death*; they are no longer to be found where they were buried. Beneath the spot where the two flowers, Adam and Durkhânî, once blossomed, there they lie together; the plants have grown to large and beautiful trees; they have wound their roots round the bodies of the lovers, and their branches intermingle, casting a shade upon the grave (cf. Darmesteter: *Chants populaires des Afghans*, p. 117).[1]

The Indian "Song of Songs"[2] resembles "Salámán and Absál" in its description of how the beautiful Radha gradually draws Krishna away from the allurements of the wood-nymphs, who typify the five senses. The Tenth Sarga ends with these lines,

[1] Cited by H. S. Chamberlain in his "Richard Wagner," chap. iii. p. 310. Translated from the German by G. Ainslie Hight. London, 1900.

[2] "Indian Poetry." By Sir Edwin Arnold. Trübner's Oriental Series.

whose application to the closing passages of *Tristan* will be at once seen—

> "So they met and so they ended
> Pain and parting, being blended
> Life with life—made one for ever
> In high love" . . .

In the Eleventh and last Sarga, "The union of Radha and Krishna," we find the same idea of the two being predestined for one another, already noted in the First Act of *Tristan* (see *ante*, pp. 10, 11, 48)—

> "Enter, thrice happy! enter, thrice desired!
> And let the gates of Hari shut thee in
> With the soul destined to thee from of old."

Finally, a striking example occurs in the "Dream of Ravan," a mystical study of the Râmâyana—the Iliad of India—which appeared anonymously in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1853–1854—

> "Before all time—beyond—beside,
> Thou rememberest her, eternally,
> For she is thy spirit's primeval bride,
> The complement of thy unity,
> Joined or dissevered, averted or fond,
> 'Twixt her and thee an eternal bond
> Exists, which, tho' ye were to seek,
> Ye cannot ever, ever break—
> A bond from whence there is no freeing,
> Since the typal spirit never
> From its antitype can sever,
> She is a portion of thy being
> To all eternity."

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

IN our book on *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin* (Vol. II. of this series) we drew attention to certain evidences of Wagner's strong sympathy with Buddhism, and reproduced the end of a letter signed "Your grateful Buddhist." As further evidence we may now point to the constant references to Buddhism in the Wesendonk Correspondence, which has since been published. The following short extracts—in addition to those we have already quoted in this Interpretation—will be sufficient for the present purpose :—

"You know how I have involuntarily become a Buddhist."

"Yes, my child, the illustrious Buddha was right in his exclusion of Art. Who can feel more distinctly than I, that it is

this unfortunate Art that eternally thrusts me back on the torments and contradictions of life. If this wonderful gift, this strong predilection for the plastic phantasy were not in me, I could become a saint, following with clear perception the promptings of the heart. . . . Oh, if you silly scholars could understand the great loving Buddha, you would gaze in wonder at the depth of perception that showed him that the practice of Art was the surest hindrance to salvation."

In these letters Wagner explains the meaning of the Buddhist teaching involved in the renunciation of all worldly possessions, and the taking of the yellow robe and the begging bowl. He also discusses the story of the Buddha's favourite disciple, Ananda, and his love for the Tschandala maiden Sawitri—which formed the basis of his dramatic sketch, *Die Sieger*—and he dwells upon the importance of the fact that the Buddha finally decided to admit woman to the "Path of Liberation."

In our Preface we have spoken of the influence exerted by Frau Wesendonk in the creation of the *Tristan* drama.

Nothing can command our admiration more than the silent, self-effacing part played by this noble woman therein, reminding us of Isolde's words in Act I. concerning her secret aid to Tristan. During Wagner's residence at the Cottage Asyl, on the Wesendonks' estate, he set five of her short poems to music, two of which he inscribed "Studies for Tristan und Isolde."[1] In "Dreams" (*Träume*) we recognise the germs of the Night scene in Act II., while "In the Hothouse" (*Im Treibhaus*) contains the motives in the Prelude to Act III. and that of Isolde's Magic. The authorship of these poems was not revealed, but in a letter written from Vienna (Sept. 28, 1861) Wagner makes an interesting reference to them and their place in the inner history of the birth of the *Tristan* tragedy. He says that he had been unpacking his things, and unlocked a portfolio containing these and other treasures—

"Heavens, how it affected me! Two photographs—the birth-places of *Tristan*: the green hill with Asyl, and the Venetian palace [the

[1] Five Poems. Translated by A. C. Bunten. The music by Richard Wagner. London: Schott & Co.

Wesendonks' house]. And then the birth-leaves with the first sketches—wonderful embryos; also the dedication verses[1] which I once sent to the Child with the finished pencil sketches. How I rejoiced over these verses; they are so pure and true! I found also the pencil leaf of the song out of which the Night scene arose. God knows, I liked this song better than the proud scene itself! Heavens, it is more beautiful than anything I have done: I am moved in my inmost soul when I hear it! How were it possible to have such a memory ever present in one's heart without feeling more than blessed?"

This tragic episode may be closed by giving a portion of the touching and beautiful letter written by Wagner to his sister Kläre, dated 20th August 1858, which is introduced in the Preface to the Wagner-Wesendonk Correspondence by the editor, Prof. Golther, with the following remarks:—

In the spring and summer of the year 1858 the neighbourly relations with the Wesendonks had several times been disturbed by Frau Minna's morbidly irritated mood. Yet on the 31st of March the Beethoven concert took place in the hall of the villa Wesendonk in which Wagner made an artistic offering to the house

[1] See the Wagner and M. Wesendonk Correspondence, pp. 23, 287, German edition.

of his venerated friends (Glasenapp 2, 2, 177). But the retreat on the green hill could no longer be maintained. A disagreement between Frau Minna and Frau Wesendonk had taken place and a reconciliation was no longer possible. Dignified and friendly relations with the neighbouring house could not be restored in Minna's presence.

The Master himself gave the reason which finally induced him to give up the retreat in a letter to his sister Kläre (of the 20th of August 1858) "in order to give explanations where they were needed." May we be allowed to give an extract from this letter written in the fullest confidence, since, after all, publicity has been given to it elsewhere (*Tägliche Rundschau* of Sept. 23, 1902):

"What has for the last six years supported and consoled me and especially given me the strength to hold out at Minna's side, in spite of the enormous difference in our characters and dispositions, is the love of that young woman who approached me timidly, hesitatingly and shyly in the beginning and for a long time, but then more and more confidently. As there could be no possibility of a union between us two, our deep affection became of that sadly melancholic character which keeps back everything common and low and recognises its only source of joy in the well-being of the other. Since the time of our first acquaintance she has taken the most indefatigable and tenderest care of me and has in the most courageous manner

obtained from her husband everything that could make my life easier. And this love that had never been mentioned by either of us, had at last to be openly expressed, when last year I composed *Tristan* and gave it to her. Then for the first time she was overcome and declared that now she would have to die. Imagine, dear sister, what this love meant to me after a life of struggling and suffering, of excitement and sacrifice! However, we recognised at once that a union between us two could never be thought of and so we resigned ourselves. Renouncing every selfish wish we suffered and endured, but—loved each other."

He then goes on to explain the difficulties created by his wife's action—

"gossip reached my ears and at last she so far lost her self-control that she took possession of one of my letters and—opened it. Had she been able to understand it, this letter could really have given her the consolation she desired, for our resignation was here also the subject of discussion. But she only fastened on the intimate expressions and lost the real meaning."

The result was that Wagner decided to withdraw from a situation which threatened to compromise his friends and benefactors, and once more become a wanderer.

In connection with the Look motive we have mentioned the importance attached

by Wagner to the exercise of the "seeing" faculty: "More than all Philosophy, Ethnology and History, one hour of genuine sight once taught me," he writes, in a "Letter to H. Von Stein" (*Prose Works*, vol. vi. p. 326). He had been watching the coming and going of crowds of school children at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and the sight had caused him keen distress: "This was remarked," he continues, "by a spiritual Sister who was conducting one of the troops of girls with utmost heed and scarcely dared to lift her eyes at the gate of entrance; her glance met mine too fleetingly to possibly awake in her an understanding of my state; yet I had just been practising my sight so keenly, that in that glance I read an inexpressibly beautiful solicitude as soul of all her life. This seized me all the more impressively, as in not one of the countless rows of led and leaders had I met its fellow, or anything alike. . . . All without soul except that one poor sister."

More than one writer had spoken of Wagner's remarkable eyes, the following being taken from the Reminiscences of A. Lesimple: "Who once has looked

Wagner in the eyes, can never forget that deep, unfathomable light that shone from them,—there was something miraculous in those eyes. He himself set great account on a person's look, and I well remember his telling me that he could read the whole man from his glance."

We have already quoted Wagner's opinion, at the time he was at work on *Tristan*, that performers sufficiently gifted to undertake the principal parts were "very rarely born": Preëminent among such artists was the young tenor, Ludwig Schnorr, of Carolsfeld, who was the first to play the part of Tristan. Unfortunately, like one or two others who were really helping Wagner's work, he caught a chill on a draughty stage and died at the early age of 29. In a beautiful appreciation of his work (*Prose Works*, vol. iv. p. 227 *et seq.*) Wagner makes some special references to his impersonation of Tristan, which serve to throw further light on the drama itself, and especially upon the way in which it was intended to be performed:—

"As regards his doubts of the executability of the Third Act of 'Tristan,' Schnorr told me

they had less arisen from any fear of over-taxing and exhausting the voice, than from his inability to understand one single passage; but a passage which seemed to him the weightiest of all, namely the curse on Love (see *ante*, p. 108), and especially the musical expression of the words: 'from sweetness and suffering, laughter and sorrow' ('*aus Lachen und Weinen, Wonnen und Wunden*') and so on. I shewed him how I had meant it, and what manner of expression, at any rate prodigious, I wanted given to this phrase. He swiftly understood me, recognised his mistake in imagining too quick a tempo, and now perceived that the resulting 'rush' (*Ueberhetzung*) had been to blame for his failure to hit the right expression, and thus for his missing the meaning of the passage itself. I admitted that with this slower tempo I was certainly making a quite unwonted, perhaps a monstrous demand on the singer's strength; but *that* he made utterly light of, and at once proved to me that precisely through this ritenuto he was able to render the passage to complete satisfaction. To me that one feature has remained as unforgettable as instructive: the utmost physical exertion lost all its fatiguingness, owing to the singer's having grasped the right expression for the words; the spiritual understanding gave forthwith the strength to overcome the material difficulty. And this tender scruple had weighed for years on the young artist's conscience; his doubt of being able to reproduce one solitary passage had made him fear to match his talent against

the whole task; to 'cut' that passage—the ready expedient of our most celebrated opera-heroes—naturally could never occur to him, for he perceived in it the apex of the pyramid to which the tragic tendence of this Tristan towers up. . . . In truth even yet, when jotting down these recollections after three years' interval, it is impossible for me to adequately express myself about that achievement of Schnorr's as Tristan, which reached its summit in my drama's final Act; and impossible, perhaps, for reason that it quite eludes comparison. Entirely at a loss to furnish so much as an approximate idea thereof, I believe the only way to transfix that terribly fleeting miracle of musico-mimetic art will be to ask the genuine friends of my self and works, both now and in times to come, before all to take into their hands the score of this Third Act. They first would have to pay close heed to the orchestra, from the Act's commencement down to Tristan's death, and follow carefully the ceaseless play of musical motives, emerging, unfolding, uniting, severing, blending anew, waxing, waning, battling each with each, at last embracing and well-nigh engulphing one another. Then let them reflect that these motives have to express an emotional-life which ranges from the fiercest longing for bliss to the most resolute desire of death, and therefore required a harmonic development and an independent motion such as could never be planned with like variety (*Kombinationsfülle*) in any pure-symphonic piece, and thus, again, were

to be realised only by means of instrumental combinations such as scarce a purely-instrumental composer has been compelled as yet to press into his service to a like extent. Now let them observe that, regarded in the light of Opera, this whole enormous orchestra bears to the monologues of the singer — outstretched upon a couch, too—the mere relation of the accompaniment to a so-called solo: and they may judge for themselves the magnitude of Schnorr's achievement, when I call on every candid hearer of those Munich performances to testify that, from the first bar to the last, all attention, all interest was centred in the actor, the singer, that it stayed riveted to him, and never for a moment, for one single text-word, did he lose his hold upon his audience, but the orchestra was wholly effaced by the singer, or —to put it more correctly—seemed part and parcel of his utterance. Surely, to anyone who has carefully studied the score, I have said enough to signalise the incomparable artistic grandeur of my friend's achievement, when I add that already at the full rehearsal unbiassed hearers had credited this very Act with the most popular effect in all the work, and prophesied for it a general success."

According to Emil Heckel, whose appreciation of Frau Wagner's stage-management of *Tristan*, especially in the Second Act, we have already quoted (see

ante, p. 91): "Wagner had always cherished the intention of calling quite a number of conductors to Bayreuth, to teach them the great importance of the scenic picture and dramatic action, down to their tiniest details. To the Kapellmeister he was never tired of saying that an insight into the drama gave the proper tempo of itself."

Although most of the parallels to the *Tristan* drama are to be found in Oriental literature, the central idea is very clearly expressed by more than one of our own thinkers. Writing in 1642, the Christian mystic, Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682), says in his *Religio Medici*:[1]—"Omitting all other, there are three most mystical unions: 1. two natures in one person; 2. three persons in one nature; 3. one soul in two bodies; for though indeed they be really divided, yet are they so united, as they seem but one, and make rather a duality than two distinct souls.

"There are wonders in true affection, it is a body of *Enigma's*, mysteries, and riddles; wherein two so become one, as they both become two."

[1] The Temple Classics. Ed. by Israel Gollancz, M.A. London, 1899.

Shelley's *Epipsychidion* provides one of the closest parallels. Like Wagner, he was evidently struck by the symbol of the interwoven ivy and vine (see *ante*, p. 39, and our cover design), for he writes :

"The ivy and the wild vine interknit
The volumes of their many-twining stems." [1]

Near the close occur the following remarkable lines :—

"We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh wherefore two?
One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grew
Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
Touch, mingle, are transfigured ; ever still
Burning, yet ever inconsumable ;
In one another's substance finding food,
Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
Which point to heaven and cannot pass away ;
One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One heaven, one hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation !"

In his *Witch of Atlas*—a poem deeply imbued with the ancient spirit of symbol-

[1] In ancient Greek symbology Dionysus (or Bacchus, the Vine) crowned with Ivy represented the "Anointed" or perfect being. The later signification of Bacchus was a degenerate one, having nothing whatever to do with the pure original Dionysus, whose altar stood within the circle of the tragic chorus.

ism — there are also certain points of similarity.

That Wagner should have been familiar with Shelley's works is not surprising when one remembers the enormous scope of his studies. In 1851 he writes to his friend Uhlig: "I recommend to you and to K. my new friend, the English poet Shelley. There exists only one German translation of his works by Seybt, which you must get. He and his friend Byron together make up one complete and noble man."

Wagner's familiarity with Shakespeare dates from his earliest school-days when, at the age of twelve, he learnt English in order to study his works; and to the day of his death he was wont to read passages therefrom in the family circle. A comparison of *Romeo and Juliet* with *Tristan and Isolde*, would form an interesting study, for which, however, we have no space, and must be content simply to point out that the story of a great love, which forms the entire content of the former, becomes in the latter the vehicle of an esoteric doctrine — after the manner of Jámí (see *ante*, p. 127).

Opinions have always been divided as to whether there is a mystical side to the story of Dante and Beatrice; but Wagner, as might be expected, saw a very definite symbology in it. Writing to Liszt from London, on June 7, 1855,[1] concerning his friend's intention to write a Dante Symphony, he says:

"I have followed Dante with deepest sympathy through the 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio'; and when I emerged from the infernal slough, I washed myself, as does the poet, with the water of the Sea at the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory. I enjoyed the divine morning, the pure air. I rose step by step, deadened one passion after the other, battled with the wild instinct of life, till at last, arrived at the fire, I relinquished all desire of life and threw myself into the glow in order to sink my personality in the contemplation of Beatrice."

This language of course brings to mind the scene in the *Ring* trilogy at the end of *Siegfried*, where the young hero passes through the fire and wakes Brünnhilde. There is also a remarkable parallel in the

[1] Wagner-Liszt Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 92, 93. Wagner came over at the invitation of the Philharmonic Society to conduct a series of their concerts.

close of the "Salámán and Absál" of Jámí—which we have already cited (see *ante*, p. 124)—not only to these words of Wagner's but also to the closing scene of *Dusk of the Gods*—

". . . So now
Of sere wood strewn about the plain of Death,
A raft to bear them through the wave of Fire
Into Annihilation; he devis'd,
Gather'd, and built; and, firing with a Torch,
Into the central flame ABSÁL and He
Sprung hand in hand exulting. But the SAGE
In secret all had order'd; and the Flame,
Directed by his self-fulfilling WILL,
Devouring Her to ashes, left untouch'd
SALÁMÁN—all the baser metal burn'd,
And to itself the authentic Gold return'd."

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